



Eastern Michigan University

Undergraduate Conference in Philosophy 2023 Abstract List

Zyaire Hadrian Agee

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The Plight of the Diverse Practitioner

Following a proposal to shift the prevailing burden of justification from diverse practitioners to the discipline of philosophy itself made by Anita Allen, philosopher Kristie Dotson calls for the neutralization of biases within philosophy by redirecting from a culture of justification to a culture of praxis. This paper will further investigate the means of implementation for such a move in addition to identifying the ways in which this, too, will ultimately result in an unjust-though regrettably necessary- burden of justification on diverse practitioners. Understanding the nature of institutional incentives to actively preserve the established philosophical canon, I question the future of philosophy where diverse practitioners are involved and express concern regarding the daunting duty of being a diverse practitioner within the discipline.

Allison Ambrose

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St. Augustine Supports the 4th Dimension: Modernized Medieval Metaphysics

In his famous Confessions, St. Augustine makes the claim that God is atemporal and develops a meta-physical conception of what time is, supporting both of these ideas and his claims of how God interacts with time with a few key Scriptures. While he presents interesting ideas about how time should be understood by Christians, there are multiple contradictions in his argument. Namely, he maintains the empirically supported idea that humans do exist in time, creating a duality to existence for God and man. His claim that “[God’s] today does not give way to any tomorrow or follow after any yesterday” doesn’t check out with his Presentist stance. I will argue in support of God’s atemporality, but against his conception of time itself, presenting eternalism as a theory that fits better with his own ideas and solves a few inconsistencies in his arguments.

How and When to Assist Wild Animals

Nature is notoriously cruel to the wild animals that reside in it. The vast majority of wild animals will suffer from predation, sickness, or starvation in their lives. In some situations, though, humans seem to be able to alleviate some of their suffering. But what obligation, if any, do we have to do so? This is the problem of wild animal suffering (WAS). In this paper, I defend the claim that what is best for wild animals is a general principle of human noninterference, with some narrow exceptions. Call this claim narrow interventionism. First, I motivate the problem of WAS and describe the current literature's dialectic. Second, I support a narrow interventionist thesis by expanding a popular flourishing account with four different considerations regarding wild animal wellbeing. Finally, I use these considerations in evaluating the ethical soundness of two potential applications: white nose syndrome in North American bats and tiger culling in Eastern China.

Making Sense of Mathematical Platonism: An Ancient Approach

I divide this paper into two broad sections. In the first section I argue for mathematical Platonism using two arguments: a contemporary indispensability argument and a more ancient Neo-Platonic argument. The former takes an approach based on 'inference to the best explanation' and scientific theories, but as a result faces serious objections. For example, scientific theories change, and because the argument is dependent on the latest scientific theories, it seems that the argument can't give one epistemic certainty in the conclusion. The latter argument draws on ancient Greek thought - specifically Proclus, and his Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's *Elements*. This argument does not rely on scientific knowledge, but metaphysics, and thus seems to establish a conclusion not dependent on changing knowledge. I follow up the exposition of these arguments with two criticisms from contemporary philosophy of mathematics.

In the second section of the paper, I introduce Proclus's way of thinking about mathematical entities. In contrast to Aristotle, Proclus thinks that the soul contains mathematical forms as latent actualities (λόγοι), which account for the possibility of math. Because mathematical entities always are in the soul, and not some 'separate world' as modern critics of mathematical Platonism think, the epistemic access problem falls away. I then address the causality problem by pointing out that numbers contain a unique type of causality which physical objects do not possess. This stems from the use of the Greek word 'aitia' (αίτια).

Benjamin Campbell

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I'm Still There, Looking for You in that Forest: A Phenomenological Investigation into PTSD

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental disorder that has gained a great deal of attention since its formal inception in the 1970's. But like many other mental disorders, there exists a gap between the lived experience of the PTSD sufferer and the scientific knowledge of the psychiatrist. If phenomenology is, as Husserl says, the unifying, sense-giving foundation of all science, it seems we must start inquiry with a scientific understanding of lived experience. I will attempt to bridge the gap between psychiatry and lived experience by using phenomenology to make clear the essence of PTSD. In our investigation, we will examine PTSD through a broadly Husserlian lens. Guided by the symptomology of PTSD, we will attempt to make clear the features of consciousness that render PTSD possible as a configuration of consciousness. Special attention is paid to memory, presence, and the Heideggerian concept of care. We uncover, by the end, that the essence of PTSD, is temporal "stickiness"—wherein the past sticks to all temporal modes through recollection. Assuming that our description is successful, we have more evidence to believe that phenomenology is a proper and reliable methodology for understanding lived experience—and therefore all science.

Joana Diaz

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Sylvia Wynter's "Demonic Grounds" as a Human Spiritual Beyond

This essay explores the nature of Sylvia Wynter's "Demonic Ground" in which its inhabitants opens up a new spiritual possibility, counter to the common notion of an organized 'religion', specifically Christianity. I argue that Wynter's work frees spirituality from its assimilation into the religious, giving alternate modes and locations from which, the Human may find deliverance. With the contribution of Katherine McKittrick's explication of the 'demonic' being an uncertainty ascribed through the human, this gives rise to new possibilities through which we may rethink various modes of being. McKittrick's focus on this ground through black female spatiality brings into question the religious Christian barriers placed on the racialized and gendered human, where Garba and Sorrentino pick up on the transcendence of blackness from the secularization and racialization parallel, finally returning to Wynter's focus on the place of the Human and the possibility for an emancipatory beyond. The "Demonic Ground" provides a locus from which religion and spirituality, race, and the place of the Human may be rethought, or liberated.

The Zhuang-Topia

Despite the viability of a comparative study, the open-endedness throughout *The Zhuangzi* defies a simple categorization as a species of skepticism. First, I show through Zhuangzian fictionalism that the imposition of a particular interpretation is self-undermining to the textual strategies of *The Zhuangzi*. *The Zhuangzi* values natural sceneries, animals of supernatural qualities, routine tasks, as opposed to investment in careerism, chasing of reputation and social status. Its aporia manifests itself in an ataractic mindset that facilitates and maintains appreciation for even the most insignificant elements of daily life. Second, I show that *The Zhuangzi*'s emphasis on supposedly apolitical, asocial, arational, and even agnostic rhetoric underlies the marginalized role of Taoism under the dominance of Confucianism. *The Zhuangzi* chooses silence over participation in state affairs, serves as a trailblazing model for healing traumas, and exemplifies the therapeutic value of a quiet life. I aim to highlight the open-endedness of *The Zhuangzi* that draws cooperative endeavors of comparisons, despite that the methodological disproportionality diminishes the comparability. Mean-while, the prominent interpretations that closely aligned Pyrrhonian skepticism with *The Zhuangzi* is an o-versimplification that is nevertheless not easily dismissed. Instead, the comparison emphatically brings out our philosophical allegiance to the ancient Greco-Roman world.

Desires: To Motivate or To Please?

One of the leading theories of welfare says that the fulfillment of our desires is what makes our lives go better. But what is the nature of desire? What does it mean to have a desire? What relation (if any) do desires have to our actions, motivations, or other mental states? The dominant theory of desire in the philosophy of mind, known as the motivational theory, essentially defines desires as motivational states. However, in this paper, I argue that motivation is neither necessary nor sufficient for desire, and so we need a new theory of desire. I then explore the motivational theory's leading contender, the hedonic theory, which essentially defines desires as dispositions towards pleasure. After evaluating different formulations of the hedonic theory in response to problems, I hold that a version of the hedonic theory that reduces our desires to dispositions to feel pleased when we imagine our desires being fulfilled is the correct one.

Neuropsychological and Epistemic Justification for Inclusivity and Knowledge Production

This intersectional and interdisciplinary paper brings together philosophy, psychology, and neuroscience in a novel way. We will utilize existing findings in these areas to conduct our research about the inclusion of marginalized groups in society, specifically relating to policymaking. Marginalized groups refer to those who have been oppressed and excluded from knowledge production due to their race, sex, belief, etc. In this paper, we will be specifically referring to historically underserved groups that have not been a part of policymaking. They are the ones who are not considered “elite” in society and make up the majority of the population. We will analyze the epistemic justifications for the inclusion of diverse viewpoints using the feminist standpoint theory of epistemology. This is the view that there are many perspectives and experiences that, historically, have not been included but ought to be included to advance our understanding and knowledge of the world around us. Then, we will examine empirical justifications for inclusion using the current findings in neuro-scientific and psychological research. Particularly, we will be depicting how experiences influence prefrontal lobe development over time, which also influences the way we perceive others. In addition, we will use Premack and Woodruff’s theory of mind to characterize how humans understand and label other people’s cognitive state, based on their own subjective experiences. At the end, we will combine and discuss both empirical and epistemic findings to include marginalized social groups in policymaking.

Enigmatic Goddesses and Eleatic Mortals: Investigating Parmenidean Oneness

In this paper I argue for an interpretation of Parmenidean oneness as a unity rather than an absolute. Scholarship on Parmenides’ fragmented poem is often focused on one of its three sections, titled the “Way of Truth.” I aim to show that an interpretation of oneness as unity allows for a coherent reading of the poem that spans all three parts—the “Proem”, “Way of Truth” and “Way of Opinion”—and furthermore aligns with a historical investigation, making it a reasonable and charitable understanding of Parmenides’ argument. I first examine several influential interpretations of Parmenides, namely the traditional existential reading, the logical-dialectical reading, and the epistemological reading, and show where historical scholarship raises issues for them. I then explore the ambiguity in Parmenides’ poem that allows for my suggested shift in interpretation to take place. Finally, I construct a reading of the poem based on my interpretation of oneness, drawing on the whole text to show that the new reading holds up to the problems I raised with other interpretations. Explaining the very existence of multiple distinct parts of Parmenides’ poem has proven problematic for its interpreters. A crucial antidote to this issue and an attitude I hold throughout the paper is the belief that each part of Parmenides’ work is a genuine part of his philosophy proper and should not be dismissed as an afterthought.

Forgiveness in Relationships and Community

In order to capture all of our practices of forgiveness, I take a pluralist and functional approach in which I point out the importance of relationships and community to our analyses of forgiveness. I argue that relationships and communities in the contexts of our cases of wrongdoing are largely what helps to determine how and when forgiveness is appropriate while building off of Miranda Fricker's account which takes liberation from redundant blame to be forgiveness's function. Beginning with a brief background on the kinds of forgiveness, I argue that pluralist functional accounts are better able to capture our practices because accounts which are not pluralist neglect the functional similarities between the cases of forswearment of resentment, and a functional account can help us differentiate forgiveness from other kinds of responses to wrongdoing. From there I build on Miranda Fricker's account of forgiveness by presenting a case that reveals the importance of relationships and community in the shaping of forgiveness itself. Like Fricker, the function of forgiveness is still liberation from redundant blame, but the plurality of forgiveness is explained both by its pieces being arranged in different ways, and the ways that our relationships and communities change that arrangement. Thus, relationships and communities are part of the fabric of forgiveness and require more attention in our analyses of this phenomenon.

The Benefits of Embracing a Pluralistic Approach to Nature for Environmental Decision-Making

In terms of value, taking a pluralistic approach to environmental decision-making is similar to taking a pluralistic approach to strictly human-based decision-making—especially for enhancing human understanding. Constellating the similarities between pluralistic approaches to both environmental and human-based decision-making potentially improves public approval of environmental decision making, because decisions concerning strictly humans are generally better received for the endowment of a pluralistic approach. The mainstream American view of nature, however, doesn't allow for pluralistic definitions, instead conceiving it as a single monolithic concept. Ironically, though, humans are tied to nature, especially in the age of the anthropocene; a pluralistic approach to environmental decision-making would account for this rather than reducing nature always to an economic good in a cost-benefit type of way. To highlight these similarities, I will look at multiple conceptions or "senses" of nature to show the need to take a diverse range of approaches to environmental decision-making. Nature deserves to not only be included in the realm of decision-making, but to be considered with the same depth, range of approaches, and diversity of disciplinary viewpoints as when we make strictly human decisions. By outlining these many "senses" of nature, I aim to demonstrate the utility of taking a pluralistic approach to discussing nature. Through a pluralistic approach to nature, I want to underline the relevancy of nature's representation as not a singular whole, but rather a culmination of different stakeholders at a "table of conflict," if you will. I will show how taking

this approach to the particular “senses” I outline will complicate not only the understanding of nature as a stand-alone, but also how human’s capabilities (in terms of Nussbaum’s capabilities approach) are directly enhanced by considering these “senses” at a “table of conflict.”

Kerrigan Miranda

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A Language Without Words

Music has its own unique way of communicating that is not tied to any specific culture or language. Beyond its aesthetic appeal, music possesses inherent characteristics that enable it to function as a language, conveying emotions, ideas, and narratives. Just as words are combined to form sentences and paragraphs in language, musical notes are combined to form melodies, harmonies, and rhythms. These notes, rhythms, and melodies of music can be understood and appreciated by people from different parts of the world, regardless of the language they speak. Language is defined as a system of conventional spoken, manual (signed), or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, express themselves. The functions of language include communication, the expression of identity, play, imaginative expression, and emotional release. Music is also composed of written symbols and these symbols allow for expression of identity, imaginative expression, emotional release and communication. This paper explores the ways in which music is a language in its own right through discussion of how we utilize music to communicate, tell stories, protest, as well as the relationship between music and rhetoric.

Oliver Niehaus

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Defending Thomson’s Violinist Case Against the Killing vs. Letting Die Objection

Judith Jarvis Thomson’s groundbreaking 1971 paper, "A Defense of Abortion," ignited a profound shift in the discourse surrounding the ethics of abortion. Thomson's unique perspective, acknowledging the fetus as a human person with a right to life, while still advocating for the permissibility of abortion, remains a subject of intense debate. Central to her argument is the ingenious “Violinist” thought experiment, which challenges conventional notions of fetal personhood and abortion ethics. This paper critically examines Thomson’s argument, particularly in response to the prominent “killing vs. letting die” objection. It scrutinizes the objection’s implications and exposes its inadequacies through a careful analysis of additional thought experiments. By doing so, it illuminates why the objection falls short of undermining Thomson’s position. Furthermore, this paper delves into the intricate distinction between killing and letting die, contending that this distinction may not accurately capture the moral essence of abortion ethics. It posits that, instead of focusing on the method by which a death occurs, the more pertinent question is whether the act leading to that death is just or unjust. In this light, I propose a reframing of the abortion debate, shifting the discourse from the mere categorization of actions to a more profound consideration of justice and ethics. This paper not only defends Thomson’s argument against the killing vs. letting die objection but also offers a fresh perspective on the

abortion debate by challenging the conventional framing of the issue. By emphasizing the significance of just actions, it strives to contribute to a more nuanced and meaningful discussion surrounding the permissibility of abortion in contemporary ethical discourse.

Daniza Nono

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Artificial Intelligence Evolving to Have A Soul

The increased popularity and interest of Artificial intelligence (AI) has caused the resurgence of questions about whether it is conscious and if AI could ever gain consciousness. A common understanding of what it is to be conscious is usually regarded as to be aware. In philosophy of mind, however, it provides a deeper understanding of what consciousness is, one being the ability to have intentionality and introspection (Craig, 1998). Although in the past it would seem impossible for machines to be conscious, I would like to argue that with the sudden explosive growth of AI it can be possible. AI had originally been built with program specific tasks and algorithms including but not limited to, playing games like checkers or chess, or image and pattern recognition. As of late, AI now has neural networks and pattern learning AI that contribute to recent technology like Apple's Siri and ChatGPT. The recent involvement of ChatGPT has proved it possible for AI to sound natural in a conversation, similarly to how Turing had argued that for a machine to be intelligent, it must pass a conversation off to sound human. In this paper I would like to go into detail about the argument of Alan Turing as well as John Searle's Chinese Room argument. I would also like to go into depth about the achievements of AI as of recent and the reasons why AI has not reached consciousness today but will evolve to in the future.

Nicole Reid

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Hermeneutical Injustice and Special Education

Hermeneutics is a branch of philosophy that is concerned with interpretation. Importantly, it is concerned with the interpretation, understanding, and communication of our own experiences. Our identities, how they are constructed and performed, are based a large part on how we interpret, understand, and communicate our experiences. Hermeneutical injustice, then, occurs when there is a gap in our own ability to understand our experiences let alone communicate them to others. This directly impacts identity. Students in the K-12 Special Education system in this country experience this lacuna. In this paper I will explore the Hermeneutical injustice faced by students in public school special education. By looking at the medical and charity models of disability, I will propose that students are subjected to what can be called an Educational Model of Disability. This educational model directly impacts the identity of these students through a language of deficit. With no language of pride or accomplishment, these students are more vulnerable to poor educational and life outcomes. I will then engage with a few ways in which our special education teachers could make real strides in mitigating this gap and providing special education students with confidence in identities as worthy and successful young people.

On Permission

If I permitted you to take a picture of me, would that permission be legitimate? What about if I denied you permission to go to the same grocery store as me? Would that permission be any less legitimate? The problem of “permission” can take on many forms, yet the act of either granting or receiving permission in a social context is largely problematic. The implication of granting permission is, at its strongest, acceptance—but, at its weakest, toleration. In this essay, I argue that the widely acknowledged conception of permission between persons, that is the allowance of one individual or group towards another individual or group to engage in a particular activity, is morally impermissible and dehumanizing when it pertains to the existence of persons. Further, I will discuss what the ramifications are for this conception of permission, focusing on the social context of permission—between majority and minority groups. Then, I will consider possible remedies to the problem of permission and settle upon the strongest argument that I believe sufficiently addresses the question. This argument I will call the argument from identity. The argument from identity calls upon the fundamental principles of philosophy of language, in that it understands “permission” to be used in a context that renders the term meaningless. The object of our permission becomes impermissible— not meaning that the object of our permission is acting in a way that is morally wrong, but that we are unable to permit certain aspects of personhood, identity, and sometimes even the resulting behavior.

More Than We Can Chew

Eating disorders are prevalent among women in western cultures. Whether or not we realize it, these habits typically result from an external pressure from these cultures on women’s bodies. Femininity has been described as a discipline of the female form. This discipline has taken the form of diet and fitness culture which has only been magnified with the emergence of diet culture. Our bodies are under constant scrutiny and with the goal of attaining an idealized consumable form, harmful ideas about eating, and exercise have become normalized. This paper will examine the relationship between patriarchal values and their impressions on women’s health habits. Statistics and medical data will provide insight and evidence into the issue of eating disorders disproportionately affecting women. Following, it will analyze and expand upon other feminist writers in developing a philosophical argument that establishes disordered eating as a phenomenon that is a direct consequence of from sexist oppression. Drawing from the foundational writings of Bordo, Bartky, and Foucault, this paper aims to relate the different arguments and analogies developed by each of these authors to illustrate the eating disorder as another embodiment of oppression. In further analysis, modern articles will be cited in order to judge this relationship through the lens of emerging social media and celebrity culture. While it is important to recognize the root of these issues, it is also vital to provide a philosophical means to mitigate their harms and take steps to address them.

Moving Forward and Looking Back: Place and the Moral Significance of Historical Reckoning

In this paper, I will engage in the question of the moral importance of reckoning with the history of a place, especially the complicated legacies that characterize regions like the US South, and the moral responsibilities that follow from it. Recognizing places as having a historical life, I argue that there is a moral responsibility to reckon with the legacy of a place through its public acknowledgement, education, and engagement. Given that a place shapes identity of its residents, how they perceive the world and interact with others, and how they progress forward as a community, it is critically important for residents to a robust understanding of their past, not only to avoid repeating the past and interpreting the present accurately, but also to help them construct a self-conception that is properly responsive to history. This generates an obligation from political authorities and residents to implement practices and support measures to raise the historical consciousness of residents. I will appeal to Milledgeville as a valuable example of how to properly reckon with a complicated past in a way that encourages social change without erasing a legacy that we can learn from. The variety of means that Milledgeville utilizes to teach its residents about its history, both the valuable and the darker injustices of racism and slavery, provide a template for others. These means focus upon a variety of museums and other historical sights which they try to preserve and make attendance affordable for any who wish to learn.

Mental State Ascription in Lack-of-Skill Knobe Effect

The Knobe effect is the phenomenon where people judge the intention of an agent's action asymmetrically, seemingly based on the moral implications of those actions. In this study, I found empirical evidence supporting an alternative hypothesis of the Knobe effect, namely the mental state ascription hypothesis. First, I illustrate Knobe's original account of the Knobe effect, then explain why Knobe's account contradicts the ordinary understanding of intention. Then, I distinguish between two types of Knobe effects: the side-effect effect and the lack-of-skill effect. Subsequently, I introduce the mental state ascription hypothesis, explain findings on its application in the side-effect effect, and hypothesize that the mental state ascription hypothesis could account for the asymmetrical attribution of intention in the lack-of-skill effect. Results provide some support for the mental state ascription hypothesis explaining the lack-of-skill Knobe effect, namely when the participants were ascribing intention to agents with moral baseline mental states rather than to agents with immoral baseline mental states. The results could suggest that both Knobe's original moral valence hypothesis and the mental state ascription hypothesis play a role in how people ascribe intention. Since these two hypotheses predict opposite results when people ascribe intention to agents with immoral baseline mental states, the effects of these two hypotheses could cancel each other out when judging agents with immoral baseline mental states.

