



Eastern Michigan University

Undergraduate Conference in Philosophy 2023 Abstract List

Matthew Adelstein

Saturday | 3-3:50 pm | Alumni Room (342)

The Circular Paradox of Moderate Deontology

Existing versions of deontology hold that some acts are so terrible that they shouldn't be done even to prevent more of those acts. For example, one ought not murder even to prevent multiple other murders. Many previously have explored a paradox of deontology, arguing that this produces a paradoxical result. Here, I shall present a new paradox of deontology that poses very significant challenges to the moderate deontological view, showing that it's committed to denying very plausible principles. In doing so, I show that moderate deontology must deny the very plausible view that the fact that some act would give people that always make the correct moral choice extra options does not make that act less choiceworthy.

Avery Brewer

Sunday | 3-3:50 pm | Tower Room (348)

The Metaphysical Laboratory: How Virtual Reality Expands the Horizons of Gender Theory

Virtual reality, robotics, and AI simultaneously constitute novel territory for metaphysical exploration, while also functioning as tools to probe existing philosophical questions; in particular, these technologies have fascinating implications for the metaphysics of gender, race, and other human kinds. Social constructionist philosophy explores the “naturalness” versus the “constructedness” of these kinds, but the field is limited so long as human sociality is tied to human physicality. In recent decades, queer theory as well as philosophy of gender and sexuality have exploded, gender-affirming surgery and hormone replacement therapies are increasingly common and accepted, and social constructionist views of gender boast mainstream popularity. These factors contribute to a growing skepticism—or at least curiosity—about the nature of gender, not only among philosophers, but also the general public. Is gender the same thing as sex? Is gender determined by physical facts? Are gender and sex immutable traits? Virtual reality, robotics, and AI collectively function as a metaphysical experimental space in which we can test the robustness of human kinds hypothesized to be socially constructed, while also supplying new kinds of bodies, and even bodiless entities, in which we can further learn about how our sociality affects ontology, and vice versa. In this paper, I invoke the work of social constructionists and philosophers of technology, while also incorporating relevant media, to explore the philosophical implications and opportunities of these novel technologies.

Benjamin Campbell

Saturday | 11-11:50 am | Alumni Room (342)

Aku no Hana: Philosophy and the End of Adolescence

Age is a defining characteristic of human life. Surprisingly, there is little in the way of formal philosophies of age. Fortunately, literature somewhat bridges this gap and often offers interesting perspectives on age. In this paper, I explore *Aku no Hana* by Shūzō Oshimi, a manga that is principally concerned with adolescence and its end. I expound its unique philosophy of age. By analyzing Oshimi's commentary and the character arc of its main character, Kasuga, I will develop its philosophy of age. In particular, I will seek to elaborate (1) its pessimistic interpretation of adolescence and (2) its elevation of maturity as a value. At the end, I make some brief remarks about *Aku no Hana*'s place as a unique philosophy of age.

Roshan Dahale

Saturday | 9:00 – 9:50 am | Tower Room (348)

On Radical Moral Encroachment: Distancing Epistemology From Truth

Rima Basu has described radical moral encroachment as a theory that detaches wrongdoing from action and attaches it to the belief instead. Furthermore, the stakes are associated with the wrongness of the belief rather than the risk of being false. Basu believes that this form of encroachment accurately captures our modern intuition on how racism functions. However, this paper lays out objections to this form of thinking. The rebuttal includes making the distinction between assumptions, probabilities, and outright beliefs. Probabilities and assumptions cannot be equated with an outright belief. Next, there is the issue of making the wrongdoing of another an internal action. It remains unclear how one can wrong another without any action toward the other. Third, there is the dilemma of the point at which the truth can outweigh a “racist fact” or “immoral fact”. If one admits that any moral wrongness outweighs the truth, then it would be easy to become detached from reality and truth. If one admits that the truth holds more importance, there would be no need to uphold any form of moral encroachment at all. Finally, there is the extreme burden that would be placed on those who attempt to practice epistemological responsibility under radical moral encroachment. This paper provides objections that serve to refute the validity of radical moral encroachment as a useful or practical epistemological theory.

Chloe Duren

Saturday | 3-3:50 pm | Tower Room (348)

Silence of the Scientists: The Illocutionary Disablement of Epistemic Authorities on Social Media

The proliferation of misinformation on social media is a topic that has been in the interest of epistemic philosophers in recent years. However, this paper examines the topic through the lens of language philosophy, as there are certain harms that can only be explicated through this point of view. First, social media is a uniquely poor epistemic environment. Epistemic environments are the totality of resources and circumstances relevant to assessing epistemically interesting statuses of individuals within the environment. They can be better or worse depending on how well they put their members in positive epistemic statuses. The environment on social media is worsened by certain environmental characteristics and disputable conventions. Second, to “do” something with your words is to perform an illocution. For the illocution to be successful, it requires uptake by the hearer, which is recognition that the speaker has performed said action. Ultimately, a consequence of the poor epistemic environment of social media is the illocutionary disablement of epistemic authorities (i.e. those in a position to inform people about things). This is because the conventions on social media are set up in such a way that prevents the uptake of epistemic authorities’ illocutions on social media. Thus, when they try to inform, users do not recognize them as doing so, so uptake does not occur, and they are illocutionarily disabled, or indirectly silenced. This phenomenon is harmful, as we have seen with COVID-19, climate change, and election misinformation.

James Goodman

Sunday | 1-1:50 pm | Tower Room (348)

The Interconnectivity of Brain Juice and Consciousness: Exploring the Compatibility of Neurophysiological and Teleological Explanations

This paper disproves the assertion that teleological explanations and neurophysiological explanations of behavior are, by-definition, incompatible, by presenting a logically valid possibility where both teleological and neurophysiological explanations can be true. Firstly, I examine the incompatibility thesis through the lenses of Norman Malcolm and Charles Taylor, who argue that the existence of neurophysiological explanations would render intention impossible. To disprove its incompatible nature, I utilize N.J. Block’s following thesis: if a logically valid possibility exists where teleological explanations can be reduced to neurophysiological explanations, then an a priori assertion of their respective incompatibility is not possible. I present such a logical possibility, and argue that neurophysiological and teleological explanations may describe the same concept, one on a microscopic, scientific level and another on a comprehensible level fit for our consciousness — similar to the relationship between a

computer's binary and a programmer's code. Overall this paper serves to disrupt the popular concept that humans are either mechanical robots or rational actors. My aim is to convince readers we may be rational actors operating on a mechanical framework.

Cameron Green

Sunday | 10-10:50 am | Tower Room (348)

In Defense of a Family Resemblance Account of Gender

Controversial and central to discourse on gender, and women's studies are the questions "what is a woman?", and "what does it mean to be a woman?". These are not only metaphysical problems but politically salient issues that have real implications on peoples' lives. The challenge then is to come up with an account of gender which adequately answers the metaphysical questions and does not deny anyone their basic existence, that is, to live as their preferred gender. In this paper, I defend a family resemblance account of gender put forward by analytic philosopher, Natalie Stoljar, which I believe overcomes these challenges in theorizing gender. While some accounts of gender, such as social hierarchy models, require that individuals satisfy a set of necessary conditions to be a given gender, Stoljar's account does not require that there be anything strictly identical in common between individuals in order to be a given gender. This makes her account an all inclusive one. However, there are other political objections to her view which I consider. For example, some argue that making oppression a necessary condition of the concept "woman" is important in order to understand the social reality of gender as classes which privilege some and oppress others. After exploring some possible responses, I hold that Stoljar's account of gender (without modification) can give us an understanding of gender-based oppression, while also holding that oppression is a non-necessary feature of gender and especially of what it means to be a woman.

Anika Jain

Sunday | 10-10:50 am | Alumni Room (342)

Inescapable Presence of Unhuman Workers Under Capitalism

In this paper, I address the inescapable presence of workers who are unable to realize their human potential under capitalism as a result of unalienated labor. This paper aims to dispel the notion that work in a capitalist framework can be unalienated. To prove this, I analyze the three most common modes of production used under capitalism: job, batch, and flow production. Each section will analyze a different mode, firstly discussing how capitalists use that mode to profit-maximize. Secondly, I will discuss how the use of this mode presents unresolvable issues that prohibit workers from experiencing their true

human potential – the ability to freely exercise their natural powers.

Carson Johnston

Saturday | 4-4:50 pm | Tower Room (348)

“The Algorithm Decides” : Unintentional Agency Laundering & Explanation

In this paper I explore a situation under-explored by AI researchers where those who deploy decision-making algorithms unintentionally launder their moral agency to algorithms through anthropomorphic ascriptions of their underlying architecture. Often, this kind of agency laundering occurs rather innocently, by attempting to render an otherwise opaque system transparent through simplified and analogous explanations intended to enhance the decision subject’s understanding. Consequently, when unintentional agency laundering happens, the decision subject’s agency to seek recourse for adverse outcomes is undermined in the process of laundering the data controller’s moral agency to a non-agent. This paper explores this situation as it pertains to traditional philosophical accounts of responsibility, explanation, and knowledge and engages in recent literature from AI ethics. The paper proposes that explanation can be a mechanism that closes responsibility gaps in AI. However, only if explanations do not invoke unintentional agency laundering.

Justin Luttermoser

Sunday | 2-2:50 pm | Alumni Room (342)

Ignoring Nietzsche’s Crooked Paths

A large problem in interpreting Nietzsche’s philosophy is making sense of the seeming discrepancy between his metaethical claims and his normative ethical claims. Nietzsche clearly denies that we have the ability to identify intrinsic value, yet he often makes evaluations. He will frequently make evaluative claims toward traditional systems of valuation, especially that of Christianity, and he will also suggest new values. On what grounds can Nietzsche make such claims if he denies the existence of intrinsic values? One possible answer is the Fictionalist account given by Hussain in his essay “Honest Illusion: Valuing for Nietzsche’s Free Spirits”. Hussain will argue that Nietzsche rejects values outright which will cause a fall into nihilism, and then, in response to this nihilism, we would have to create values in order to maintain a certain intensity of emotion and motivation. My thesis is that the Fictionalist approach offered by Hussain is not able to solve the problem regarding the seeming discrepancy between Nietzsche’s metaethical claims and his normative ethical claims due to its dependence on Nietzsche’s rejecting valuing generally, and its inability to make sense of Nietzsche’s remarks on honesty and self-overcoming.

Grant Nebbergall

Saturday | 4-4:50 pm | Alumni Room (342)

The Conditions of Meaning: Language and Being

In this paper, I investigate the shape of Kantian skepticism that renders the projects of late Ludwig Wittgenstein and early Martin Heidegger so revolutionary. In the course of this investigation, I explicate the status of truth that each thinker leaves us with and then engage with criticism of Heidegger's attempt to build a new system in the light of a new skepticism. Rather than directly defend Heidegger against these remarks, I use them to motivate an investigation into Wittgenstein's similar attempts at building a new system. With both thinkers facing similar critiques, I propose a comparison of the two. I turn first to a unique problem in Wittgenstein's project that stem from his starting point of investigation at language: an inability to attribute meaning to the phrase 'learn to think'. I then develop my central argument, that since Heidegger's own project can account for this problem, we should accept his starting point of investigation at Being. Working from Heidegger's innovation, I conclude that the next task is to think about thinking, in order to properly engage with Kantian skepticism and face up to the existential concerns of our lives.

Niamh Quinnan

Saturday | 10-10:50 am | Tower Room (348)

Hope, Contentment, and Shame: The Formulation of Agency in Children

In this paper, I examine how agency develops in children and I evaluate where parents and guardians are responsible for facilitating this development. I explain how parental scaffolding allows children to be supported by their parents to learn to hope, both as it is relevant to their growth and development, and as they begin to acquire particular skills relevant to their agency. Through what I call collaborative agency, I express the importance of parental facilitation and nurturing of the moral agency of their child so that they may better develop complete agency by adulthood. I explain the roles that hope, shame, contentment and community support play in an agent's development, and why it is essential to learn these skills through childhood so they may be mastered in adulthood.

Nicole Reid

Saturday | 10-10:50 am | Alumni Room (342)

Resentment, Will, and Moral Identity

Our everyday personal interactions with others are nothing if not complex.

Accidents happen, mistakes are made, and the seamless understanding of the attitudes and actions of others doesn't always occur. At some point an apology will need to be offered. In this essay I intend to examine the work done by an apology after an accidental transgression in mitigating unfavorable reactive attitudes like anger and resentment. This important work, I'll argue, is more than just a societal norm. The work of an apology not only helps others to hold us in our identity as morally responsible agents, but has the ability to engender hope in ourselves and our fellow man.

Edgar Vasquez

Sunday | 2-2:50 pm | Tower Room (348)

Becoming Harmonious: What Can Confucius Contribute to our Theory of Rights?

In the West, the core value that informs how we create and think about rights is autonomy, especially for the individual. For the ancient Chinese philosopher, Confucius, the core value to be pursued is harmony or the well-being of society as a whole. In this paper I argue that the West should also make harmony our core value. To make my case, I take influence from Confucius to look at how his theory differs from typical Western political theory. I discuss Confucius' emphasis on duties rather than rights, the idea of citizenship as a privilege rather than a right, and I aim to dismiss the concern that a pursuit of harmony would lead to an authoritarian state or diminish our autonomy.

Ethan Wood

Sunday | 11-11:50 am | Towers Room (348)

The Import of Aristotle's One

Complications concerning unity and the one are a reoccurring theme in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. In fact, in Book B which poses fourteen principal problems functioning as the dialectical fountainhead of the entire work, Aristotle explicitly states that the difficulties arising out of considering being and unity are the "most difficult to investigate and most necessary for knowing the truth" (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1001a). Likewise, both Books I and M offer extensive investigations into the meanings and applications of the one. This paper argues that the one is a universal and cannot be a substance because substance is the elemental fundament to which all predication is applied, and the one is a universally applied predicate. To argue in support of this thesis, I first demarcate two paths of inquiry present in Aristotle's explorations of the one and highlight the three kinds of substance. Subsequently, I explain how the universality of the one prohibits the one from qualifying as a substance. Then, I outline the impact of this understanding of the one on the Platonic Pythagorean and Aristotelian views of numbers. Ultimately, I conclude with uncovering the predicational capacity of the one by considering a few things of which the one is predicated.

James Young

Sunday | 11-11:50 am | Alumni Room (342)

Alienation and Moral Culpability

This paper makes a connection between Marx's concept of alienation and moral culpability. As it stands, many workers are alienated from their labor. I argue that the degree to which workers can be held morally culpable for their actions is influenced by alienation. I do this by showing how laboring for subsistence can come with the alienation of a worker from their labor. Then, I draw comparisons between and explore the nuance of alienated workers having to sell their labor for subsistence and survival situations. This shows that the views that people have regarding the moral culpability of one's actions in survival situations can be comparable to the views one has about the actions of alienated workers who sell their labor for their subsistence. I also provide another angle where alienation and moral culpability are connected. This is how alienation can lead to one being ignorant of the consequences of their actions as an alienated worker. I do this by drawing parallels between the actions of an alienated worker who's ignorant of the consequences of their actions and someone else doing harm through their actions without knowing that they are doing harm. This shows that alienation, through ignorance, can also influence moral culpability. I conclude by suggesting that alienation from labor puts many workers in a position where they can't be held morally culpable for many of their actions as workers.

Jonas Zhai

Sunday | 9-9:50 am | Tower Room (348)

Civic Identities on Death Row

Introduction of the death row has fundamentally changed the death penalty. Scenes from medieval themed movies where the condemned gets pulled out of the courthouse straight to the execution ground are modified with the addition of a long wait time between the sentencing and the execution. The implementation of death row has two sides. On the one hand, it guarantees the due process of law and protects those sentenced to death from miscarriages of law with long and prudent procedures of appeals. On the other hand, it imposes a unique form of mental stress upon the death row inmates unimaginable to the outsiders: execution that awaits at an unpredictable moment. This paper will evaluate the interaction of the two sides and discuss their impacts on the death row inmates' civic identities, i.e. their role in the society and their perception of their interactions with other members of the society. I argue that the legal procedures involved in an inmate's time on death row restores the inmates normal civic identities, which are impaired by the death sentence, yet with the unique mental challenges present simultaneously, the death row inmates still inevitably loses significant fragments of their civic identities during their time on death row.

Tom Zhang

Saturday | 11-11:50 am | Tower Room (348)

A Parsimonious Approach to the “Problem of Many”

In this paper I present an improvement to van Inwagen’s solution of the “Problem of Many.” The basic structure of the paper will be as follows. In section I, I introduce the “Problem of Many” with an example. In section II, I present van Inwagen’s solution to the problem. Then, in section III, I examine the drawback of van Inwagen’s solution and introduce my improvement to it. Finally, in section IV, I argue for some advantages of replacing his original solution with my improvement.
