Eastern Michigan University

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2017 Abstracts

Emily Aquino, University of Maryland – College Park

In this paper, I will argue that Divine Command Theory is wrong, and morality is independent of religion. First, I will argue that God's commandments lack a sufficient amount of context for morality to apply to all of life's diverse situations—the world is not as black and white as it seems, and people have resorted to drawing moral conclusions from what they perceive to be God's character, as opposed to what he explicitly commands. I will also respond to the "We Know God's Nature" argument from theists. Next, I will argue that even if God did bestow upon humanity an inner intuition that would clarify and explain God's will for every moral decision one might have to make, DCT would still be wrong because it detracts from God's worthiness of reverence, and the fact that some moral facts are unchangeable. Finally, before concluding, I will argue that there are some moral facts that are inherently moral and independent from God's will, as well as moral facts that rely on God's personal whim, and people typically follow the latter out of a sense of obligation to God as the creator. Additionally, I will address an argument from Stairs and Bernard that there are some (pseudo-)tasks that God simply cannot perform, thus exhibiting a limitation on the creator, and thus Divine Command Theory.

Andrew Beddow, University of Michigan – Ann Arbor

Aristotle's political philosophy is generally regarded as essentially illiberal. Liberalism grounds the principles of justice in the natural rights of independent individuals, whereas Aristotle is typically associated with a conservative or communitarian politics that de-emphasizes the importance of the individual. In recent years, however, there has been a resurgence of scholarship on the influence of Aristotelianism on liberal political theory. While I believe a strong case can be made for Aristotle's historical influence on the development of liberal thought, I will restrict my focus here to the possibilities that Aristotelian philosophy offers for a defense of the importance of individual freedom, with a special focus on private property rights. Drawing upon the work of Douglas B. Rasmussen and Douglas J. Den Uyl, I argue that Aristotle's conception of eudaimonia supplies the moral framework for a robust defense of individual freedom as a necessary condition on and constitutive element of human flourishing. It follows from this and a limited number of assumptions about human nature that flourishing will require a legally protected sphere of external freedom, namely private property rights, though I will restrict the scope of this freedom more narrowly than do Rasmussen and Den Uyl. Finally, I will turn to the Stoic doctrine of oikeiosis in order to address Rasmussen and Den Uyl's failure to adequately justify the grounds of other-concern and the obligatory nature of rights claims.

Zan Bhullar, Florida International University

In this paper I examine several time traveling paradoxes and throughly illustrate why each is impractical. I shall be examining (I) the infinite loop paradox, followed by (II) the grandfather or auto-infanticide paradox & lastly (III) the multiverse determinism paradox. The purpose for

demonstrating these paradoxes is to show the implausibility of time travel; which is apparent from the the absurdities these paradoxes would permit.

Mackenzie Bouverat, Ryerson University

In this paper, I briefly explicate the reasons for which Bernard Williams, Johathan Bennett, Pamela Hieronymi and Kieran Setiya have argued that beliefs — while they are subject to the will — cannot be acquired at will. While I accept their conclusions concerning the fact that beliefs cannot be acquired at will, I call their explanations of this fact into question. It is not, I allege, a metaphysical or conceptual necessity that beliefs are involuntary, as each of the philosophers under discussion have asserted; the involuntarism of belief cannot be discovered analytically or a priori. So, doxastic involuntarism must be a causal necessity. The reason for which beliefs cannot be acquired at will, I contend, is that beliefs are caused by certain processes of belief acquisition, through which a subject comes to represent a proposition as both justified and true. ⬚ Thereafter, I emphasize the failure of impersonal evidence to provide the grounds for belief acquisition in all cases. With certain modifications, the reasons that I provide for which beliefs cannot be attained at will can be extended to an explanation for the impossibility of acquiring desires at will, as desires are only acquired if what is desired is represented as good in some respect. The representation of the goodness of the thing desired, then, is taken as an indication that the desire in question is justified.

Sarah Bruckler, Eastern Michigan University

A popular theory of cognition is computationalism, which argues that human cognition functions in a similar fashion as computer processing. A premise of the computationalist theory is that cognition occurs only in the mind. This solipsistic view of human cognition forms the foundation of computationalist methodology, but research in other disciplines suggests that the solipsistic view is not accurate. Given this, it is necessary to ask if the solipsistic view is a necessary and useful premise of computationalism, and whether computationalism can survive as a theory without it. In this paper, I argue that the solipsistic principle is not essential to the computational view, and should therefore be dropped.

Isabella Carlsson, Northeastern University

Risk is not a consequence of a decision problem and should not be treated as one. Paul Weirich reveals that the axioms of standard Decision Theory as postulated by Savage do not account for risk, and how this might be problematic to our understanding of making rational decisions. He proposes to include risk in the representation theorem, as it might affect rational agents' decisions in ways that should be permissible. This is, however, incompatible with the Expected Utility Hypothesis, although Weirich argues Expected Utility should be applied to the newly constructed representation theorem. This paper argues that Weirich's suggestion is either already captured by utilities representing outcomes (already commonly used in Decision Theory), or causes problems of infinite regression and redundancy. Moreover, risk should not be considered a consequence of a decision problem; instead, it should be viewed as a factor of

an agent's utility for an outcome that agent is already aware of at the point of deliberation (that is, when making the decision). Changing the representation theorem in the ways suggested by Weirich is therefore not a successful way to account for risk in the context of solving decision problems using expected utility.

Dylan Delikta, Eastern Michigan University

For Hegel, architectural structures reveal cultural understandings about how we understand the self and the world around us at any given point in history. What I seek to do in this paper is to identify what sort of cultural understanding is revealed through contemporary architecture such as the skyscraper, the symbol of modern capitalism. To do this, I present Hegel's analysis on the cultural meanings that are revealed in Classical and Romantic architecture, using the Temple of Athena and the Cathedral of Our Lady in Antwerp as examples. Next, I draw on Heidegger's discussion in "The Question Concerning Technology" of the technology as a way of "enframing" in order to argue that, context of modern capitalism, contemporary architecture reveals the world, and ourselves, as part of a "standing reserve." In the last part before the conclusion, I delve further into how a "technological worldview" persists, using Foucault's discussion of Panopticism in his book Discipline and Punish. Through my discussions of Heidegger and Foucault, I use the Willis Tower in Chicago as an example to help elucidate the argument that contemporary architecture makes space for a "technological worldview." By bringing into attention the ways architecture make space for cultural understandings, we better understand the impact architecture has in revealing the self and the world, and thus grants us an opportunity to reveal the world through other ways than the technological.

Zakary Drabczyk, Grand Valley State University

The statement, "S believes that p", seems substantially different from, "it seems to S that p", but what makes the two so different? In his 2009 piece Against Phenomenal Conservatism, Nathan Hanna explores this question and concludes that there may be no substantial difference at all; according to Hanna, beliefs may be a sort of appearance or at least behave like appearances to such an extent that one could reasonably confuse the two. This would be a disaster for Phenomenal Conservatism (PC) because, according to PC, appearances are the sort of things that confer foundational justification to beliefs. If beliefs are just another type of appearance, then PC could allow beliefs to justify themselves . The purpose of this thesis is to defend PC against Hanna's criticism and develop a more robust understanding of appearances, beliefs, and the relationship between the two. In order to dissolve Hanna's belief-appearance problem, I establish two necessary conditions of appearance-hood that I argue could not be satisfied by a belief. Importantly, these necessary conditions pertain to the epistemic qualities of appearances -- what sets them apart in an epistemic lens. The idea is to prove that appearances and beliefs are not only distinct but appropriately distinguishable from the vantage of subjective awareness, which is crucial for PC.

Brandon Flynn, The University of Kentucky

This paper will look into the moral hazards of Wall Street trading bundled mortgage-backed securities, which led to the Great Recession. First, I will go through a brief introduction of the events leading up to the stock markets crash in 2007-2008. I will then pull from ideas from moral thinkers to support the claim that Wall Street was neither mutually beneficial nor efficient for our economy. Because Wall Street was neither mutually beneficial nor efficient, I will argue why deregulation on the financial industry does not work and maintain that regulations need to be tightened on the banking sector. If we continue to deregulate Wall Street, we are surely headed for another financial crisis.

Gina Gaebl, St. Mary's College of Maryland

Feminists of the Western world claim to be for the liberation of all women, yet face a number of challenges in the pursuit of truly acting upon this. One of these challenges is the way in which Western structures, such as capitalism, thrive off of the exploitation of women in developing countries. Other related challenges include the unintentional belittling of the cultures and feminist movements of developing countries through cultural imperialism and culture-blaming. In this paper, I argue that the only version of feminism that truly works for the liberation of all women is socialist feminism. Furthermore, this must be a version of socialist feminism that allows for feminists to approach to approach the dismantling of capitalism in whatever way is most feasible and effective for them to do as such. In this paper I focus specifically on the way that materialist ecofeminism in developing countries is a necessary component to the global dismantling of capitalism.

Cody Myers, University of Michigan – Flint

In feminist critiques of the biological link between sex and gender, the significance and even existence of objective bodily facts has become a matter of dispute. By bodily facts, I mean the idea that a body actually has either certain traits, organs, sex categories, etc., independent of human activity influencing or determining what these things are. I want to preface this paper by stating that I am not arguing for objective sex categories, but instead for the possibility that there are objective bodily facts at all, whatever those might be. In attempting to answer these questions, and to do away with oppressive bodily views that link specific genders with sex, there have emerged 'anti-realist' accounts which argue that the body and certain of its facts are socially caused, and so have no objective existence, i.e., no existence which isn't subject to human interpretation—that is, they aren't really real. I will first critique some assumptions of the anti-realist theory of Judith Butler from the realist position of Sally Haslanger, after which I will critique its implications with respect to disability, drawing on the work of Susan Wendell. I will argue that the anti-realist view, though liberating, nevertheless promotes an attitude toward the body that has the unfortunate fault of indirectly sustaining stigmatization of those with disabilities by assuming a level of bodily control that is unrealistic. A feminist critique of traditional mappings of sex and gender need not reject a realist account which acknowledges

objective bodily facts. In fact, such a realist position allows for bodily, sexual difference, avoids biological determinism of sex/gender, and avoids the stigmatization of those with disabilities.

Ilyana Illieva, Belmont University

The three centuries separating medieval and contemporary philosophy often result in a complete segregation of the respective philosophers encompassing them, as well as the theories they develop. Given the linearity of time, the overlaps present amongst the ideas created and expounded upon from one philosopher to the next provide an interesting realm that ought to be analyzed. As a result in the following paper I will be analyzing the theoretical interplay between Al-Ghazali, a medieval mystic, and Edmund Husserl, a contemporary phenomenologist. My thesis defends the position that Al-Ghazali's idea of self-knowledge is similar to Husserl's idea of positive science due to the focus of the two terms, and the way in which they use 'essence'. It will also defend the position that Husserl's idea of philosophical science is similar to Al-Ghazali's idea of higher knowledge as a result of the origins of the two terms, the requirements for their existence, and due to their focus on epistemological reflection. In addition, it will thus oppose the stance that the self-knowledge is similar to the philosophical science, and that the positive science is similar to the higher knowledge, due to the nature, compoundability, and aim of each of the four terms.

Mahmoud Jalloh, Northeastern

In this paper I aim to critique, analyze, and update the existentialist ethic based on developments in information and communication technologies (ICTs). The increases in the availability and capability of ICTS has done more than increase our powers, ICTs have changed who we are, and how we see – how we understand the world. Such changes necessitate a revision of the existentialist virtue of authenticity. To do so I draw upon the existentialists of the last century Heidegger, Sartre, and de Beauvoir. My main critiques of their conception of authenticity (from Grene) are that (1) this old authenticity was dependent on a vacuous, overly formal conception of identity and personhood and (2), due in part to (1), this old authenticity was not properly action guiding, which is a desiderata for any ethical theory. My corrections to this old conception constitute a relational conception of authenticity, in which our relationships and (therefore) selves determine what actions are authentic. I then argue that there is no principled reason why online peronas or relationships cannot be authentic, allowing for the virtuous existentialist to be authentic in online spaces.

Arian Kambakhsh, University of Michigan – Ann Arbor

In this paper, I discuss what matters in life. I begin by outlining the position, based on Robert Nozick's "The Experience Machine," that what matters in life is not restricted to subjective states. I attempt to refute this view by evaluating what I take to be its strongest motivation, that activity matters in life. This is followed by an Aristotelian defense against subjective

experience as the singular importance for humans, which I respond to by highlighting an inconsistency in Aristotle's ethics. I conclude that subjective experience is all that matters in life.

Aine Keefer, Eastern Michigan University

An important concept that has come out of feminist film critique is that of "gaze", also called "male gaze": the objectifying both literal and metaphorical lens that an assumed "default" male viewer has through media that depicts women from a masculine point of view. This gaze is constructed as necessarily objectifying; when scholars posit a "female gaze", it is also cast as objectifying, simply with gender reversal from Mulvey's classic formulation. I maintain that gaze can also be "subjectifying" through the process of relation between people who hold each other in equal regard and do not assert power one over the other. In both seeing and being seen, there is power to restore agency to the objectified through reciprocal relation. I explore this idea in the context of film not only as a vehicle of illustration, but also as an interaction between artist and audience, and assert that gaze has equal power to harm or heal, to reduce or restore agency.

Tyler Porter, Fort Lewis College

The main purpose of this essay on the conceptual ontological argument is to assert that an extension on past refutations of the argument is needed in order to fully invalidate it, and then to describe exactly what that extension is. Before this conclusion is reached, however, a brief précis of Anselm, the position, and its past refutations will be laid out. This descriptive aspect begins with an account of the ontological argument's origins, before going on to describe Kant's famous rejection of the claim that existence is a great making property. I argue that Kant's method is currently the best refutation of the ontological argument, but that it only holds if existence is not a property, which is an assumption that my argument does not rest upon. From there I go on to discuss the hyperintensional refutation to the ontological argument, and how it is very close to succeeding, but that there is ultimately a failure to recognize and deal with the true ramifications of denying the ontological commitment of the word "conceive" - namely, that one must still conceive of God as actually existing. After this I discuss my solution to this alternate conclusion: the assertion that Anselm and his followers have wrongly committed a false equivocation on conception.

Evelyn Reilly, Oakland Community College

This paper aims to resolve the incompatibility that appears to arise between human free will and the existence of a creator God who has set forth a plan for human life. Notable philosophers, such as Jean-Paul Sartre, believed that if God exists, human beings cannot be free. If this is the case, then the free will theodicy used to counter the argument from evil and defend the existence of the traditional God is invalidated. However, through further analysis, this paper aims to show that the existence of a God with a plan for humanity does not

undermine the possibility of human freedom. When freedom is understood as abandonment of self-will and surrender to God's will, God becomes the foundation which makes freedom possible.

Mishka Repaska, Eastern Michigan University

In this paper I defend Helen Longino's theory of objectivity as presented in Science as Social Knowledge. A strength of science is seen to be its objectivity. However, given the social context that science is practiced in, it is difficult, if not impossible, to remove the prevalent background assumptions of the time period. Longino holds that science becomes more objective when scientists "check" each other's work, specifically allowing for background assumptions to be identified and questioned. Unfortunately, Logino does not provide a clear answer as to who the stakeholders in science should be nor how broad this democracy should be. This paper will focus on these questions as well as what the implications of this view on science today are.

Lydia Jane Roy, Glasgow University

The world we live in is dominated by ideology. The philosophical question of whether or not 'knowledge' is simply a facet of our ideological constraints is important to how we engage with art, especially literature. This paper examines the relationship of knowledge to ideology, both in a literary and a philosophical sense, by reading Milton's Paradise Lost in conversation with Le Guin's The Dispossessed and dissecting the ideological settings of each text, how knowledge is symbolized, and how the two concepts govern one another. In studying the remarkably similar narratives that Milton and Le Guin develop—with both repositioning a contemporary ideological conflict in a fantasy-style setting—it becomes clear that both share a preoccupation with the inner workings of ideology and how knowledge relates to it. Specifically, both use their fantastical setting as a background of ideological conflict, conflict disrupted or altered by the 'acquisition' of knowledge in some form. Using Foucault's theoretical framework of the 'episteme' as put forward in The Order of Things, it becomes clear that knowledge is not wholly defined by ideological conditioning but that, instead, the two ideas function in tandem with one another to create a sense of reality. Thus, literature can be read as an exploration of both of these interlinked philosophical concepts, expounding upon the influence of ideology in our own reality. In considering knowledge and ideology not as equatable, but codependent, we can better understand how such concepts can interact with literature and the realities it constructs.

Zach Thornton, Michigan State University

In this paper I will present a problem case which questions whether Lewis' account of counterpart theory is able to adequately determine an individual's modal properties. The problem case details how, by virtue of an individual being an identical twin, it is either impossible for them to win the lottery or is impossible for them to go to France. Just on the face of it, this seems like a quite peculiar problem. I propose a solution that uses origin essentialism, the view that the intrinsic properties of an individual's creation is necessary to the individual's identity, along with a tie-breaking criterion to give remedy to the problem case. I also give an

argument why this particular remedy satisfies intuitions we may have about what our counterparts must be like given David Lewis' theories of causation and time.

Wendy Wang, University of Toronto

This paper explores how various philosophers contribute to the discussion of medical disclosure. I assert that full medical disclosure is a moral necessity, and medical professionals have a duty to deliver the full truth regarding a patient's medical condition—including their own professional opinion without any false hopes. To support this claim, I will first use a case study to frame my discussion, and explore the various possible approaches guided by Worthington Hooker and Terrance Ackerman. Conclusions from the appropriate course of action will then be used to analyze the current Canadian Medical Code of Ethics. The paper will conclude that our current paradigm warrants attention, and that there is an ethical imperative to address the insufficiencies raised in this paper to guide physicians in disclosing medical information to their patients.

Lauren Williams, Eastern Michigan University

The field of Artificial Intelligence is constantly growing. However there has been a long standing problem in the field, known as the Chinese room problem. Here I briefly explain the problem before looking at what Michael Laufer, Lawrence Shapiro, and Andy Clark have said about the problem. I claim that Laufer bases his critique off of a flawed assumption. I argue that Shapiro misses the point of the Chinese room argument and focuses on meaning instead of understanding. Then, I argue that Clark brings to light an interesting question but fails to follow through with bringing an end to the Chinese room problem. Finally, I argue that all of them rely on the concept of understanding and claim that no progress can be made until the concept of understanding is agreed upon.