

13th Oxford Philosophy Graduate Conference

ABSTRACTS GRADUATE TALKS

November 2, 2009

Harry Adamson (University of Cambridge, United Kingdom): *What Does Blame Do To Relationships?*

The subject of this paper is Tim Scanlon's account of blame in his recent *Moral Dimensions*. To be blameworthy, according to Scanlon, is to hold attitudes which violate the standards of a particular relationship, and to blame another is to alter one's relationship appropriately with the blameworthy party in light of those attitudes. Two central concerns run through my objections. First, where does the concept of blame feature in our thoughts about how we ought to live with others? Second, should a philosophical account of blame help us to live with others as we ought, by giving guidance as to when people are to blame? For Scanlon, asking whether we should blame just is to ask whether it is appropriate to alter a relationship. Blame therefore has no special life in reasoning about our relationships, and the philosophical account offers no normative guidance. Scanlon's work, in a sense that I'll try to make clear, expresses a deep pessimism regarding the power of traditional styles of philosophical analysis. In Socratic spirit, I believe that discovering what blame is is not a trivial question, but about how one should live, and thereby about how to live with other people.

Simona Aimar (University of Oxford, United Kingdom): *Aristotle does not move by himself when he moves by himself (or so he says)*

In *Physics VIII*, while arguing for the prime mover, Aristotle says twice that animals are not really self-movers (253a10-11; 259b7-8). This is at odds with his often repeated claim that animals are self-movers. David Furley suggests that Aristotle is focusing on intentionality (intentional-view). The idea is that an animal goes somewhere because of the intention to pursue an external object. By contrast, Ben Morison contends that Aristotle recalls the division between agent and patient of *Physics VIII.5* (parthood-view). Animals are not really self-movers because only one part of them, the agent, is a mover; the other part, the patient, is merely moved thereby. This paper suggests a third way-out. In *Physics VIII*, Aristotle (i) uses self-motion in the sense of self-started motion and (ii) suggests that life-keeping processes like sleep, started, or triggered, by the environment, are a preliminary condition to the exercise of self-motion – in a way that I shall explain. Aristotle claims that animals are not really self-movers for they do not cause their own motion independently of other factors.

Stuart Crutchfield (University of Glasgow, United Kingdom): *Can We Experience Empty Space? A Puzzle About Spatial Representation in the Senses*

In this paper, I will examine what I take to be an interesting puzzle about spatial representation in the different sensory modalities. The issue is centred on whether or not we can represent empty space in perceptual experience, and which senses allow us to do so. If we grant that space is represented in experience, the question I will be addressing is ‘what is the nature of this representation of space?’ In order to determine which kind of perceptual field is present in a given case of perception, and thus determine whether empty space is represented or not, we need some principled way of distinguishing between a genuine experience of an absence, and a mere absence of experience. I am sceptical that we have such a principled method, and I will devote the rest of the paper to demonstrating why neither phenomenological considerations, nor empirical ones resolve this issue for us.

Julien Dutant (University of Geneva, Switzerland): *Two Notions of Safety*

Timothy Williamson (1992) and Ernest Sosa (1996) have argued that knowledge requires one to be safe from error. Something is said to be safe from happening iff it does not happen at “close” worlds. I expand on a puzzle noted by John Hawthorne (2004, 56n) that suggests the need for two notions of closeness. Counterfactual closeness is a matter of what could in fact have happened, given the specific circumstances at hand. The notion is involved in the semantics of counterfactuals and is the one epistemologists typically assume. Stereotypical closeness is instead a matter of what could typically have

happened, that is, what would go on in a class of normal alternatives to actuality, irrespectively of whether or not they could have happened in the circumstances at hand. The distinction sheds light on recent apparent counterexamples to safety (Szabó Gendler and Hawthorne, 2005, Comesaña, 2005, Sosa, 2007): they involve failure of counterfactual safety but not of stereotypical safety. This suggests that stereotypical safety is the one that guides intuitive judgements about knowledge. However, it is plausible to think that counterfactual safety is the substantive property the intuitions are tracking; if so, the intuitive judgements should be rejected.

Charles Girard (Panthéon-Sorbonne University, France): *Face-to-face conversation vs. mediated advocacy: Which paradigm for deliberative democracy?*

This paper discusses the relevance of a deliberative conception of democracy in large-scale societies where public communication is largely mediated. It distinguishes between two paradigms: deliberation as face-to-face conversation, and deliberation as mediated advocacy. Its main contention is that, despite robust difficulties, mediated public deliberation—i.e. mass media-mediated advocacy—is both normatively desirable and practically feasible, and that a fully deliberative account of large-scale democracies cannot do without it. I start by underlining the problem deliberative democracy faces in mediated societies: because it is inspired by the face-to-face paradigm, it is unable to address the “fact of mediation”. Four objections to the idea of mediated deliberation can be identified (I). Then, I discuss common responses to this problem. I especially argue against the third one, which suggests that we should give up on deliberation in mass media and restrict it to non-mediated arenas of communication (II). Finally, I discuss how we should proceed

to develop a paradigm of mediated public deliberation. I sketch an outline of this paradigm and attempt to the four objections, which relate to issues of publicity, equality, engagement and regulation (III).

James Grant (University of Oxford, United Kingdom): *The Dispensability of Metaphor*

Many philosophers claim that metaphor is indispensable for various purposes. What I shall call the Indispensability Thesis is the claim that we use at least some metaphors to think, to express, to communicate, or to discover what cannot be thought, expressed, communicated, or discovered without metaphor. Versions of this thesis are defended in a remarkable variety of areas: one finds it advocated by metaphysicians, linguists, philosophers of language, philosophers of science, aestheticians, and philosophers of religion. I argue that support for the Indispensability Thesis is based on several confusions. I criticize arguments offered by Stephen Yablo, Elisabeth Camp, Richard Boyd, and Berys Gaut for the thesis. Advocates of indispensability are right to insist on the value of metaphor, but wrong to assume that metaphor is of little value if it is dispensable.

Julia Hermann (European University Institute, Italy): *Knowing how to be moral*

Human beings do not only have empirical knowledge. They also know, for instance, that some actions are morally wrong and others morally right. In this paper, I will argue that—contrary to what most philosophers believe—our ‘moral knowledge’ is primarily a moral ‘knowing how’. People engaged in moral reflection in everyday life do not aim at systematic, theoretical moral knowledge, and there is no good reason to ask them to do so.

Neither should the aim of moral philosophy be knowledge of this form. Propositional moral knowledge should be understood as mere material for the exercise of practical moral knowledge. A coherent moral belief system is neither necessary nor sufficient for knowing how to act morally in concrete cases. A conception of moral knowledge as foremost practical supports the view that some of our moral beliefs are not open to justification. It makes no sense to require from philosophers that they justify those moral beliefs which are not in need of justification in the course of everyday life. Once the aim of attaining systematic, theoretical moral knowledge has been rejected, there remain other important tasks for moral philosophers.

Roberto Loss (University of Nottingham, United Kingdom): *The True Future of Branching Time*

Branching structures (sets of moments ordered by an earlier-later relation in a tree-like fashion) are used in tense logic to represent the open future. The Thin Red Line is a history marked as special on a branching structure, intuitively representing the true future: the way things will in fact turn out to be. The idea of a TRL appears thus useful to make sense of the ‘ockhamist’ position, according to which future-contingent statements are either true or false even if the future is objectively unsettled. However, as Nuel Belnap and Mitchell Green have argued, TRL theories are faced by the problem of counterfactual evaluation: how should future contingent statements be evaluated at moments lying off the TRL? The aim of this paper is to defend the idea of a TRL in the open future. To this effect, I will: (i) distinguish between relative- and absolute-TRL theories; (ii) show that in both cases the problem of counterfactual evaluation can be overcome; (iii) argue that the very idea of a relative TRL appears

at odds with genuine indeterminism; (iv) present a novel form of absolute-TRL theory and argue for its adequacy.

Chris Melenovsky (University of Pennsylvania, United States of America): *International Right and Kant's Word-Federation*

Recent interpretations of Kant's international political philosophy have argued that the formation of a world-state (Völkerstaat) is Kant's ideal for world government, despite certain passages that seem to reject it. While these interpretations have highlighted important aspects of the debate, they overlook the positive role of Kant's world-federation (Völkerbund). The Völkerbund has both a theoretical and practical role in international political theory, and by discounting its function, commentators have overlooked the primary reason why the rejection of the Völkerstaat is warranted. The day-to-day effectiveness of such a government is less important than the establishment of an international rightful condition in line with principles of Public Right. The Völkerbund acts as an adequate representative for the cosmopolitan general will, thus establishing a rightful condition and legitimate authority. While the analogy between the domestic and international state-of-nature is a central aspect of Kant's political philosophy, the similarities should not lead interpreters to favor a domestic-style state structure for world governance. The Völkerbund adequately dissolves the global state of nature without the risk of a necessarily despotic world-state.

Mihaela Popa (University of Geneva, Switzerland): *Pure Semantics Facing the Psychological Reality Charge*

My starting point is a critical discussion of psychological reality claims articulated by pure semantic accounts like Borg's (forth.)

minimal semantics. I identify various shortcomings in her attempt to reconcile the "purity" of her approach with empirical findings, and argue that the approach known as truth-conditional pragmatics is far preferable. An alternative from a relevance-theoretic perspective is offered in terms of mutual-adjustment between truth-conditional content and implicature(s), whereby many "free" pragmatic processes are needed to uncover truth-conditional content. I finally illustrate the difficulties a "pure" semantic approach has in predicting the correct order of interpretation in ironic metaphors (metaphors used ironically). E.g., Borg's predictions would be that the order of interpretation is either literal>metaphor>irony or literal>irony>metaphor, treating both metaphor and irony as implicatures. To explain why only a metaphor-first approach gives the right result, I argue for both psychological and logical metaphor's priority thesis (MPT): in all cases of IM, the metaphor is/has to be computed first. Even if Borg could accommodate metaphorical meaning as part of a pragmatically enriched level of "what is asserted," there remain concerns as to whether the metaphor-first approach in two-stages metaphor>irony (without going via literal meaning) can be predicted by her underlying rational reconstruction.

Vid Simoniti (University of Oxford, United Kingdom): *Sentimental Art Reassessed*

The negative artistic value of sentimentality—unabashed appeal to the viewers' emotions—has been one of the strongest intuitions in art criticism since at least the late 19th Century. But why is it that tear-jerking novellas about upright but unfortunate young heroines and paintings of cherubic children garlanded with flowers are now seen as somehow artistically defective? In trying to address that question, I will consider several attacks on sentimental art

that have been put forward in analytic philosophy of art since the 1970s. What is common to these attacks is that they concentrate on the allegedly morally corrupting nature of sentimentality. Sentimental art has been alleged to deform our emotional sensitivities in morally dangerous ways, or else it has been criticized for indulging the spectator in a self-deception about his own moral character—enabling him to feel emotional reward that characteristically follows a morally positive action, without actually committing him to any such action. I will argue that these moralistic attacks may offer us surprising insights into the nature of our appreciation of sentimental art (and perhaps into our cultural production more broadly conceived), but that they must ultimately fail. Instead, I will suggest, the value of sentimental art needs to be assessed on purely aesthetic grounds.

Dorette van der Tholen (Tilburg University, The Netherlands): *Contextualism Tested: The Role of Ordinary Language in Epistemology*

Recently, a renewed interest in philosophical methodology has emerged in the philosophical debate. Developments in philosophy and other sciences give rise to the question what job is left for philosophy as an a priori, analytic discipline. One way to defend the analyticity of philosophy is by appeal to intuitions. This study takes up one such theory that uses intuitions as philosophical evidence, namely epistemological contextualism, and puts the contextualist theory to experimental test. Three new scenarios are constructed on the basis of Keith DeRose's criteria, and the contextualist hypothesis concerning these scenarios was tested on test subjects by means of a questionnaire. A Kruskal-Wallis Test revealed a significant deviance from the proposed contextualist hypothesis. A subsequent discussion interprets the statisti-

cal outcome and it is argued that what the experiment shows is not so much empirical evidence pro or contra contextualism, but that what surfaces is a flaw in DeRose's presentation of the function of ordinary language in philosophy and a misguided appeal to intuition. The misguided use of intuitions by DeRose and the disconfirming evidence from experimental epistemology however does not have any implications for the use of intuitions in general.