

Department of Philosophy

Visiting Speaker Series 2015-2016

Fall Term

September 18: Barry Allen (McMaster University)

"Making Relativism True"

Abstract: I find the concept of artifact indispensable to the theory of knowledge. The artifact is the unit of knowledge, the primary, original instance, where knowledge first begins to exist. The quality that a theory of knowledge should define is a quality of artifacts, and not restricted to mental states or propositions. Knowledge is achieved in artifacts before it is "represented" in the mind. That makes knowledge a vastly greater field than, say, justified true belief. Knowledge embraces the whole sphere of artifacts, human technical culture in the broadest possible sense. These ideas lead to a new formulation of relativism. Truth and knowledge are relative in respect of their being or existence; they are also relative in respect of their value.

September 25: John Caruana (Ryerson University)

"Julia Kristeva on Nihilism and Faith: Our Late Modern Impasse"

Abstract: In his provocatively titled book, *Barbarism*, Michel Henry asserts that we are currently experiencing a radical reshaping of the world, driven in large part by a reductive picture of the scientific enterprise. Scientism, the ideological distortion of science, works to make the strangeness of the world into what can be known, appropriated, and objectified. This tendency has the effect of emptying the world of any meaning or value. For Henry, this contributes to what he calls the unparalleled "flight from oneself." Our eviscerated subjectivity no longer believes in the world or in itself. The French philosopher and psychoanalyst, Julia Kristeva has outlined, over the span of four decades, this unprecedented devastation of psychic life. She succinctly describes how our late modern world works to deform not only our self-understanding but more significantly our connectedness to others and the world. Like Henry, Kristeva points to scientism as a major source of this crisis. But equally problematic is the rise of religious fundamentalism. For Kristeva, both of these late-modern tendencies are the inevitable consequence of a breakdown in a fundamental sense of trust. Interestingly, she maintains that a renewed understanding of the problem of faith offers a key for addressing this cultural impasse.

October 2: Rebekah Johnston (Wilfrid Laurier University)

"Aristotle on Wittiness: verbally abusing one's friends in the right way"

Abstract: Aristotle claims, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, that in addition to being, for example, just and courageous, and temperate, the virtuous person will also be witty. Very little sustained attention, however, has been devoted to explicating what Aristotle means when he claims that virtuous persons are witty or to justifying the plausibility of the claim that wit is a virtue. It becomes especially difficult to see why Aristotle thinks that being witty is a virtue once it becomes clear that Aristotle's witty person engages in what he calls 'educated insolence'. Insolence, for Aristotle, is a form of slighting which, he explains in the *Rhetoric*, generally causes the person slighted to experience shame and anger. In this paper, I attempt to bring some clarity to Aristotle's claim that being witty is a virtue by examining why Aristotle thinks that the object of a witty person's raillery will, ideally, find this joking pleasant.

October 9: Katharina von Radziewsky (McMaster University)

"Reasoning By Precedent"

Abstract: When common-law judges decide cases, they often have to take binding precedent into account. My talk will introduce the two main accounts of reasoning by precedent, the rule-account and the similarity-account. I will explain why the rule-account of reasoning by precedent is ultimately untenable. I will outline the main problems similarity-accounts face. Then I will use research into the way metaphors and analogies work as well as insights of argumentation theory and rhetoric to construct an analogy-account of reasoning by precedent that can answer the main objections.

October 16: Fall Recess – No Speaker

October 23: Radu Neculau (University of Windsor)

"Making One Out of Many: Misrecognition and the Identity of Social Groups"

Abstract: According to critical social theorists like Habermas and Honneth, the identity of individuals and social groups is constituted by normative attitudes of mutual recognition. This paper presentation challenges this view in two ways. Drawing on the work on collective intentionality of Gilbert and Tuomela, it argues that recognition (as Honneth understands it) is necessary but not sufficient for the formation of group identity. And, drawing on the social psychology of Reicher and others, it argues that the unity of consciousness that secures the identity of social groups is disclosed by the attitudes of misrecognition that individuals experience in riots, rebellions, and other kinds of spontaneous collective action.

October 30: Howard Jones (McMaster University)

"The Problem with Plato's Myth of Er"

Abstract: Is the Myth of Er a fitting close to Plato's *Republic*? What philosophical work, if any, does it perform? This paper will examine the Myth of Er in the context of Plato's use of myth generally, early Greek thought on the afterlife, and the central issues of the *Republic* itself.

November 6: Jeremy Heis (University of California, Irvine)

Visiting Russell Professor @ McMaster University

"Should Kant have Thought that Logic Was Complete Since Aristotle?"

Abstract: In the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant asserts that "Since the time of Aristotle, [logic]...has been unable to take a single step forward, and therefore seems to all appearance to be finished and complete" (Bviii). Though Kant has been severely criticized for this assertion, there has been (and continues to be) a minority contingent of Kant's readers who believe that Kant's own philosophy should have convinced him that something was amiss in traditional logic, and that a new, stronger logic was necessary. In this talk, I will argue that one version of this minority view — derived, with

significant modifications from the Neo-Kantian Ernst Cassirer — is correct. My main argument depends on distinguishing the "logical structures," from Kant's point of view, of intuitions, schemata, and concepts. Since schemata are intermediaries between concepts and intuitions, Kant's account of schematic structure has implications for his account of conceptual structure -- the structures studied by pure general logic. I'll look at two concrete cases of schematic structure to substantiate this claim: "real" definitions in mathematics, and "intuitive marks" in perception.

November 13: Tilottama Rajan Centre for Theory and Criticism (Western University)

"The Anthropological 'Idea': The (De)construction of Nature Between Schelling's *First Outline* (1799) and his *Freedom Essay* (1809)"

Abstract: My paper takes up Schelling's *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* (1799) as a text that wrestles with thinking about the anthropological "Idea" often associated with German Idealism, namely the "graduated stages" or *Stufenfolge* by which nature organizes itself in an ascending scale of complexity, as "one production captured at different stages." This idea of a "history of nature" is the structuring prototype for "histories" in other domains such as aesthetics, history, mythology etc. It is what Schopenhauer more bitterly describes as the will in nature, by which a "higher Idea" subdues the "lower ones through *overwhelming assimilation*." But arguably this will is really a projection of Man's annihilation of the complexity of nature, as he tries to construct a system to contain the increasingly troublesome role played by the life sciences in the nineteenth century. My paper looks at how the complexity of nature and the identity of mind and nature as folds of each other contest this "speculative invasion of nature" (as Schelling calls it), with consequences for the "ideal portion of philosophy in the *Freedom* essay.

**November 20: Helen Fielding Dept. of Women's Studies & Feminist Research, and
Dept. of Philosophy (Western University)**

"Open Future, Regaining Possibility"

Abstract: I consider the distinctions among personal time, impersonal or natural time, and objective time, by turning to the phenomenon of teen suicides resulting from depression initiated by on-line bullying. Adolescence is a time where future possibilities ought to be the most open, but depression is experienced phenomenologically as their closing down. In a postmodern world, there is a breakdown of personal and impersonal time into objective time. This breakdown allows for infinite possibilities but they remain unconnected to lived existence. Regaining possibility thus requires the reintegration of personal time into the structure of anonymous existence, or impersonal time, in other words the reasserting of the experiential or phenomenal subject.

November 27: Jean Thomas Faculty of Law (Queen's University)

"A Model of Rights"

Abstract: Rights theory has become an increasingly fragmented affair. Legal rights, moral rights, human rights, constitutional rights, and private law rights have been, increasingly, conceptualized separately. This raises the questions of whether there is, in fact, an analytic account of rights that can be said to underlie these various uses, and, if so, what that might look like. In this paper I outline such a general model of rights. I first articulate some desiderata for theorizing normative concepts of this kind. I then argue that rights are best understood in terms of an analytically thin model comprising three normative elements: value, constraint, and the right's relational context.

Winter Term

January 8: David Hitchcock (McMaster University)

"What is an Argument?"

Abstract: Some years ago, I proposed a recursive* definition of argument. Not long afterwards, G. C. Goddu, in a paper entitled "Refining Hitchcock's definition of argument", pointed out some problems with this definition and proposed revisions to address them. I will explain how I got to my definition, consider Goddu's objections and proposals, and propose a new definition, which I will compare with the "Argument Interchange Format" being developed in the field of computer science as infrastructure for the World Wide Argument Web.

*A recursive definition consists of base clause(s) defining simple cases of the thing being defined, recursion clause(s) giving recipes for making more complex cases out of less complex ones, and a closure clause saying that nothing counts as a case of the thing being defined unless it can be constructed using the given base and recursion clauses.

Dr. Hitchcock has provided a handout for his talk that is quite substantial. Everyone who is interested in taking a look at the handout before the talk is invited to request it by writing an email to yonradk@mcmaster.ca

January 15: Pat Bondy (SSHRC Postdoc Cornell University)

"Having Reasons for False Beliefs"

Abstract: This talk will begin by setting out a positive case for the possibility of justified false beliefs, on the basis of the claim that we can construct parallel cases of true and false beliefs that are supported by the very same good reasons. I will then proceed to show that disjunctivist-style distinctions between the available reasons in parallel good and bad cases do not apply to the cases I describe, and then I'll respond to several arguments against the possibility of justified false beliefs, from Jonathan Sutton, Timothy Williamson, and Clayton Littlejohn.

January 22: Diane Enns (McMaster University)

"Roberto Esposito on Immunity and Community: Or, How to Live With Risk"

Abstract: Roberto Esposito argues that our current understanding of community is shaped by an "immunitary paradigm," evidenced by our obsession with contamination and security. In the fields of disease control and information technology the virus has become the metaphor for all our nightmares. In the political realm, protection against contamination by foreign elements—immigrants, migrants, terrorists—is the new religion. Risk is artificially produced in order to control it; we adjust our perceptions of risk to the growing demand for protection. In this talk I will draw out the implications of Esposito's response to this predicament—that we need protection against too much protection—for how we might live (with risk) in communities.

January 26: **Heidi Hurd** (University of Illinois)

David C. Baum Professor of Law & Professor of Philosophy

“Promising Schmomising”

4:30 pm to 6:00 pm *UH - 316*

Abstract: Takes a skeptical view of the notion that promises, qua promises, impose obligations on promisors.

January 29: **Marleen Rozemond** (University of Toronto)

"Mind and Mechanism in Cudworth and Leibniz"

Abstract: When we think of arguments against materialism in the early modern period, we tend to think of Descartes's well-known argument for dualism. In this paper I look at two very different lines of argument that were common in the period. One of these concerns what we would now call the unity of consciousness. The other one contends that Descartes was far too optimistic about the scope of mechanistic explanation and that all natural phenomena ultimately require appeal to immaterial entities. Consequently Descartes was wrong about where to draw the line between the material and the immaterial. These arguments assume that matter is inherently composite and passive. This idea can be found in Leibniz but also, and in an interestingly different form, in Ralph Cudworth.

February 5: **Devin Henry** (Western University)

"Aristotle and Epigenesis"

Abstract: In a recent paper Aryeh Kosman (2010) makes a “plea for the recognition that Aristotle’s theory [of animal development] is through and through a theory of epigenesis”. What he means by this is that Aristotle rejected the ancient theory of preformationism (the view that the complete organism pre-exists in miniaturized form inside the sperm or egg) in favour of a model in which form and structure emerge gradually during development from an unorganized, amorphous embryo. But there is a more interesting question that Kosman fails to consider. Modern developmental biology now recognizes two senses of “epigenesis” that give rise to what Alan Love characterizes as “a pervasive ambiguity lumbering around in the literature”. In the first place “epigenesis” is used for that familiar idea of the gradual emergence of form and structure. (Call this Epigenesis-1.) But biologists also describe development as “epigenetic” to emphasize the context-dependency of the process itself. (Call this Epigenesis-2.) According to this view developmental pathways are not fixed ahead of time by the genetic program. Rather the genes represent a set of potential pathways, and which pathways are actualized during development is determined in real time as the process unfolds in response to environmental cues (including factors internal to the developing system itself but external to the genome). This model denies the view that development is simply the gradual actualization of a pre-arranged series of changes hard-wired in the genotype so that everything proceeds in a fixed sequence once the process has been triggered. Instead a developing embryo is viewed as a more dynamic and responsive system that reacts to real-time inputs from the internal and external environment (Müller & Olsson 2003). In a word, to say that development is “epigenetic” in this sense is to say that many parts of the organism’s phenotype are determined *on the fly* as it comes into being. While it is certainly not news to anyone that Aristotle rejected preformationism in favour of Epigenesis-1, it is

completely up for grabs whether or not he thought development was “epigenetic” in the sense of Epigenesis-2. This is important because Epigenesis-1 is completely compatible with a rejection of Epigenesis-2. Someone can hold that form and structure emerged gradually from an unorganized, amorphous embryo and yet still think that the process unfolds according to a fixed sequence of pre-programmed changes. In this paper I argue that Aristotle’s theory was not a theory of epigenesis in the sense of Epigenesis-2 but instead viewed the process as much more deterministic than some recent commentators have tried to maintain.

February 9th: Grégoire Webber (Queen's University)

4:30 pm to 6:00 pm in University Hall (UH) Room 316*

TBA

February 12: No Speaker

February 19: Mid-Term Recess

February 26: Gillian Russell (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)

“Logical Vice”

Abstract: How do we choose the best logic? On one approach we should do it by evaluating rival logics for various theoretical virtues and vices. This talk looks at what kinds of things might count as virtues and vices in logic, and takes issue with some recent arguments for particular logics along these lines.

POSTPONED TO March 9: Jorge Luis Fabra Zamora (McMaster University)

“Hartian Jurisprudence Beyond the State: The argumentative conception of validity and officialdom”

Abstract: This paper is a modest contribution to the debate about the possibility of analytical jurisprudence beyond the state. Here, I am mainly concerned with attempting to defend the account of law developed by H.L.A. Hart against the critique advanced by Culver & Giudice. They argue that the Hartian model is unable to account for non-state legal phenomena, like international law or the European Union, because it is based in a hierarchical-deductive model for identifying the norms of the system and its officials. As such legal instances lack of hierarchy, Hart lacks of a proper model to identify not only which norms pertain such legal systems, but, more crucially, the officials whose practices constitute those norms. The key move of this paper is a friendly modification to the Hartian model. I develop an alternative conception of validity and officialdom that I will call, for the lack of a better name, the “argumentative conception.” The main idea is that the notion of hierarchy understood as “chains of validity” cannot account even for common legal acts within the state, such as analogy or balancing. Instead, we should take into account the processes providing reasons for taking a course of action based on some norms, or for accepting authoritative pronouncements, as central to any successful account for validity. Similarly, the same processes are fundamental to determining which officials pertain to the system. With such account in place, I attempt to show how the Hartian model provides the best account of non-state legal phenomena in spite their lack of established hierarchies.

March 11: Catherine Hundleby (University of Windsor)

"Rehabilitating Scientific Objectivity"

Abstract: The history of the concept of objectivity reveals locations for its constructive evolution and rehabilitation. It became associated with science as an element of communication and the sharing of experience (Daston 1992; Daston & Galison 2007). These social and empirical elements reveal continuity between the history of the concept and feminist revisions of it that may allow it to be effectively transformed. Conceiving objectivity as absence of perspective has been a rather recent turn in the concept's history (Daston 1992; Daston & Galison 2007), but the aperspectival ideal remains quite entrenched in contemporary thinking (Harding 2015). For decades feminists have rejected that ideal and developed alternative conceptions of objectivity (Harding 1991; 2015; Longino 1990; 1997) primarily in reaction against the aperspectival ideal. This move receives further support from recent research on implicit social biases indicates that individual reflection can be not only ineffective against such biases. An aperspectival ideal may even be counterproductive in pursuing an ideal of objectivity as value neutrality: people who value objectivity tend to have stronger social biases (Uhlmann & Cohen 2005; 2007), which makes this transformation all the more urgent.

March 18: Iosiah Ober (Stanford University)

"Democratic legitimacy and human capacities"

Abstract: A justificatory argument, in the form of the civic education provided to potential future citizens, explains what democracy is good for in material and moral terms. The question of whether limited self-government can provide essential material goods of welfare and security is posed via "Thomas Hobbes' challenge": the claim that no non-absolutist government could reliably provide security and welfare for a complex state. Hobbes' claim that absolutism is the unique solution to coordination of effort at scale can be refuted empirically. That empirical fact is explained by the introduction of plausible assumptions about human capacities; the plausibility of those assumptions is tested by asking whether Hobbes and Aristotle could both agree to them. Democracy is then shown to be good both for securing material goods adequate for security and welfare, and for the basic human good of free exercise of fundamental capacities of reason and communication in the context of making important decisions relevant to joint and several well-being.

March 25: No Speaker (Good Friday)

April 6: Andrei Marmor (Cornell University)

"Belief and Meaning in Constitutional Interpretation"

4:30 pm to 6:00 pm *UH 316*

Please email our series coordinator, vonradk@mcmaster.ca if you would like to read the paper before the talk.

April 1: David DeVidi (University of Waterloo)

"Mathematical Pluralism, Disagreement and Translation"

Joint Colloquium with Mathematics and Statistics, HH 305

Abstract: It's fairly easy to find philosophers and mathematicians (especially mathematicians) who are "of course" pluralists, i.e., who will say "Of course mathematical pluralism is true". But mathematical pluralism is, in fact, a weird idea—while the twentieth century forced us to come to terms with the idea that there might be *no* correct answers to some mathematical questions, it is harder to swallow the idea that there might be *more than one*. So pluralists have some explaining to do. When pressed, "of course" pluralists often turn out to have in mind notions of pluralism that are either trivial or uninteresting, for instance because they imply that we've all really been mathematical pluralists all along. In this paper I argue that there are interesting and non-trivial versions of this weird idea that are worth discussing. In particular, an interesting mathematical pluralism owes us an account of how there can be correct mathematical accounts of a *single subject matter* that *disagree* in some significant way. Both the notions of subject matter and of disagreement are problematic. I shall argue that the current best bet for a coherent, interesting notion of pluralism that sorts out these problems should be built on consideration recently advanced by certain Italian constructivist mathematicians and discuss what work would need to be done to get from those suggestions to a really satisfactory account of mathematical pluralism.

April 8: David Godden (Michigan State University)

"Corroborative evidence"

Abstract: Corroborative evidence has two probative effects: a primary effect by which it offers direct evidence for some claim, and a secondary effect by which it bolsters the probative value of some other piece of evidence. This paper argues that the bolstering effect of corroborative evidence is epistemically legitimate because corroboration provides a reason to count the belief based on the initial evidence as sensitive to, and safe from, defeat in a way that it was not previously recognized to be. Discovering that our belief is impervious to defeat in ways we previously didn't recognize provides a reason to positively reappraise the probative strength of the evidence on which it is based. The final section of the paper relates the proposed sensitivity- and safety-based account of corroboration to an explanation-based account.