Philosophy Department Speaker Series

Fall Term, 2017

Unless announced otherwise, all lectures are held on Fridays at 3:30pm

DeGroot School of Business B107

(New Location)

September 15: Ronald de Sousa (University of Toronto)

"Muses, Fluffers, and the Curse of Satisfaction"

Abstract: Plato was perhaps the first but certainly not the last philosopher to take a dim view of desire. Lust, in particular, offers a model of desire reducible, in Shakespeare's famous phrase, to 'expense of spirit in a waste of shame': and other poets and philosophers have argued that desire is essentially pain, that its object is often not what we think it is, and that satisfaction (in the limited measure in which it is even possible) only makes it worse. This talk begins by distinguishing semantic satisfaction (getting what you thought you wanted) from emotional satisfaction (actually enjoying what you are getting). It discusses some findings of recent brain science and psychology, due to Kent Berridge and others, that show that the natural and expected correlation between wanting something and getting pleasure from it can be disrupted. This helps to explain the phenomenon of 'dust and ashes'—the absence of emotional satisfaction following semantic satisfaction—as well as other ways in which 'satisfaction' can fail to prove satisfying. Such explanations, however, don't altogether resolve the problem of the 'curse of satisfaction'.

September 22: Richard T.W. Arthur (McMaster University)

"Monads as Constituents of Bodies in Leibniz's Metaphysics"

Abstract: One of the enduring puzzles about Leibniz's metaphysics is how Leibniz could claim that monads, understood as immaterial, could constitute the material bodies of experience. In this paper I sketch how I think Leibniz intended this to be understood. First, I situate his introduction of his monads as a solution to the problem of the composition of the continuum. With this in place, I distinguish Leibniz's notion of constitution from composition, and show how this can be construed to deliver his conclusions by constructing a kind of "characteristic" using his definitions and symbols.

September 29th and October 6th: No Talks Have Been Scheduled

October 13th: Fall Recess

October 20: Claudine Verheggen (York University)

"Davidson's Treatment of Wittgenstein's Rule-Following Paradox"

Abstract: The aim of this paper is first to show that Wittgenstein and Davidson both argue for semantic non-reductionism, the rejection of any account of meaning that does not invoke semantic notions, in similar ways, and that consequently they conceive of the use they both take to be essential to meaning in a similar way. Both think that a full account of meaning requires us to consider this use within a semantic context, so that we cannot say what speakers mean by their words, and what words mean, without saying what speakers use their words to mean, and we cannot answer the question what makes it possible for someone to have a language without thinking of her as already having one. However, whereas Wittgenstein makes only very general remarks about the kind of use that is essential to meaning, Davidson has much more to say about the topic and, as a result, provides a significantly richer and more constructive way to address the paradox about meaning and rule-following developed by Wittgenstein.

October 27: Doreen Fraser (University of Waterloo)

"The non-miraculous success of formal analogies in physics"

Abstract: When physicists develop a successful new theory, philosophers often infer that the new theory is approximately true in some respects. This is the core intuition of scientific realism, captured by the 'no miracles' argument: that success in science is explained by getting something right about the world. However, a heuristic strategy that has been successfully deployed in quantum theory undermines this realist intuition. New quantum theories have been developed by drawing on purely formal analogies to theories that apply in different domains (i.e., the formal analogies are guided by the mathematical structure shared by the two domains, but the mathematical structure is given entirely different physical interpretations in each domain). For example, the Higgs model in particle physics was developed by analogy to models of superconductors. I will argue that the success of formal analogies in quantum theory is explicable, and that the explanation carries lessons about both the shortcomings of scientific realism and the role of analogical reasoning in science.

November 3: David DeVidi (Waterloo)

"On what there is, what there isn't, and none of the above"

Abstract: It is a philosophical commonplace that logic and metaphysics have been closely related disciplines "from the beginning." The close relationship has survived, and indeed thrived, throughout the rapid evolution and diversification of logic over the past 150 years—including through rocky stages where logic was thought to be the key to rubbing out metaphysics altogether. While keeping formal details to a minimum, I will focus not on attempts to eliminate metaphysics, but on the suggestion that the tools of formal logic allow us to illuminate our metaphysical commitments. I will suggest that certain results in some non-classical logics have not yet received due consideration in the metaphysics literature. They yield a more nuanced picture of our metaphysical commitments, and thereby also a more nuanced picture of what is real, what is not, and what the other options are.

November 10: Lynne Tirrell (University of Connecticut)

"Toxic Speech"

Abstract: Applying a medical conception of toxicity to speech practices, this paper calls for an epidemiology of discursive toxicity. Toxicity highlights the mechanisms by which speech acts and discursive practices can inflict harm, making sense of claims about harms arising from speech devoid of slurs, epithets, or a narrower class I call 'deeply derogatory terms.' Further, it highlights the role of uptake and susceptibility, and so suggests a framework for thinking about damage variation. Toxic effects vary depending on one's epistemic position, access, and authority. An inferentialist account of discursive practice plus a dynamic view of the power of language games offers tools to analyze the toxic power of speech acts. A simple account of language games helps track changes in our discursive
practices. Identifying patterns contributes to an epidemiology of toxic speech, which might include tracking increasing use of derogatory terms, us/them dichotomization, terms of isolation, new essentialisms, and more. Using this framework, I analyze some examples of speech already said to be toxic, working with a rough concept of toxicity as poison. Finally, exploring discursive toxicity pushes us to find ways that certain discursive practices might "inoculate" one to absorbing toxic messages,
or less metaphorically, block one's capacity to make toxic inferences, take deontic stances that foster toxicity, etc.

November 17: Kirk Lougheed (McMaster University)

"Disagreement, Deep Time, and Progress in Philosophy"

Abstract: The recent literature in the epistemology of disagreement examines the question of how one ought to respond to awareness of epistemic peer disagreement about her belief that P.

There is an ever-growing body of literature on this topic that, ironically enough, represents widespread disagreement about how we should respond to disagreement. I will use the epistemology of disagreement to help address the question of whether there is any progress in philosophy. I argue that the widespread disagreement throughout the history of philosophy, and right up until the present day indicates that philosophers are highly unreliable at arriving at the truth. If truth convergence indicates progress in a field, then there is little progress in philosophy. I conclude that this need not make us give up philosophizing: That we are poor philosophers is a contingent, rather than necessary fact about the human species. Perhaps given the existence of deep time there will eventually will be truth convergence in philosophy.

November 24: Georgia Mouroutsou (Western University)

"Plato's Phaedo: Are the Philosophers' Pleasures of Learning Pure?"

Abstract: My question in this paper is whether the philosophers' pleasures of learning in the Phaedo are pure of pain. This is a question that, though to my knowledge it has not yet been asked about this dialogue, is very important for the development of Plato's critical project on pleasure, for the pleasures of learning are characterized as pure in both the Republic and the Philebus. In agreement with the analysis of the pleasures of learning in the Philebus, I will argue that necessarily, in contrast to bodily pleasures, the philosopher's pleasures of learning are neither preceded nor followed by opposite pains. I argue, on the contrary, that it is their nature to be free, necessarily, of such pains. That said, the philosophers' intellectual endeavors are not characterized by immunity from all intellectual pain, but by the philosophers' particular attitude toward intellectual pain.

For my purposes, I will focus on the initial example of bodily pleasure that Socrates introduces (60b3-c7) and Socrates' intellectual activities related to learning in his autobiography (the first voyage, 96a6-99d2), and will also consider the misology passage (88c1-91c5). If the picture and the conclusions I draw are accurate, then Plato's philosophical project on pleasure is unified in the following respect: although we are far before the Philebus' analysis of pleasure, Plato already in the Phaedo thinks of the relation to pain as fundamental to the nature of (different kinds of) pleasure.

December 1: François Tanguay-Renaud (York University)

"Policing Necessity"

Abstract: to follow

Philosophy Department Speaker Series

Winter Term, 2018

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12 January: Stefan Sciaraffa (McMaster University)

"On Architectonic Questions in Political Philosophy"

Abstract: A storied question in political philosophy queries whether the citizens of contemporary states are bound by a duty to obey the state. I think this is an interesting question in its own right, but I argue that it is not an architectonic question. In this essay, I introduce the notion of an architectonic question in political philosophy, and I explain why I take questions of this kind to be of particular interest. Much of this argument proceeds by way of an explication of what I take to be one such architectonic question, a query that the officials of contemporary legal systems pose and answer on a daily basis—usually implicitly but sometimes explicitly. This question asks, "What constellation of political institutions are the sources of prescriptions that we officials ought to commit to following as the guiding objects of our official actions and opinions, and why ought we so commit?" I argue that by answering this question, legal officials thereby constitute, maintain, and modify states and other polities and the political communities these polities govern. Moreover, I argue that by considering and answering how officials ought to answer this question, we ordinary citizens can learn much about what our polities and political communities are about, whether and the degree to which we can reconcile ourselves to them, and how we ought to go about carrying them forward in the best way possible.

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19 January: Susan Mills (MacEwan University, Edmonton)

"The 'best system': Descartes on natural sensory error and God's goodness"

Abstract: Immediately following Descartes's statement in Meditation Six about the "proper purpose" of sensations, Descartes recognizes a serious problem with the fact that, on occasion, our senses do not fulfill their purpose and sensory error occurs. If this were a problem of wrong judgement, Descartes could explain it as an error on our part, that is, as a misuse of our faculties. But it is not that kind of error. Rather, it is an error in the nature that God gave us, and that is a problem. On pain of contradiction with God's perfection, natural sensory error should never

happen, and yet it does.; thus, Descartes needs a theodicy. So it is that near the end of Meditation Six, Descartes declares that our God-given sensory system-with its occasional errors and all-is the "best system that could be devised."

In this paper, I will unpack what "the best" means in this context and how this defense of God's goodness is supposed to work as a solution to the problem of natural sensory error. Subsequent to that analysis, I will argue that this defense is inconsistent with the freedom of Descartes's God. In particular, I will argue that Descartes's God is not an architect in the sense of creating within the constraints of a fixed end. For this reason primarily, I maintain that Descartes is not at his own best when it comes to resolving the problem of natural sensory error. Nevertheless, with an eye to Descartes's medical ambitions, I will add that the problem is not all that devastating-indeed, it is complementary-to his philosophy beyond the Meditations.

January 26: Colleen Murphy (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)

"Transitional Justice and the International Rule of Law"

Abstract: Societies emerging from periods of conflict or repression and trying to democratize characteristically try to address past wrongs using processes other than criminal punishment. There is, however, deep disagreement as to whether justice is achieved with alternate measures such as amnesty or a truth commission. I argue that transitional justice is not aimed at giving perpetrators what they deserve, but rather is aimed at transforming a society in a just manner. Multiple kinds of processes can contribute to this transformation. I then discuss and dismiss one source of possible tension between the flexibility transitional justice may permit and the uniformity the international rule of law seems to demand.

February 2: Megan Stotts (McMaster University)

"A Behavioural Metaphysics for Social Institutions"

Abstract: It is a commonplace observation that social institutions are deeply dependent on humans. That is, the existence of social institutions such as the government of Canada, the Catholic Church, and the English language depends on humans in a way in which the existence of forests, oceans, and solar systems does not. A well-established view in the literature is that, in particular, the existence of social institutions depends on collective acceptance—that is, on our shared mental states. I will argue that the collective acceptance approach to social nstitutions is untenable. A natural response to the problems that the collective acceptance approach faces is to portray social institutions as grounded in other kinds of human mental states, but even then, there is cause for concern. I argue that instead, we need an entirely non-mental account of the metaphysics of social institutions. My positive proposal is to ground social institutions in a certain kind of copying behaviour among humans. This view respects the insight that social institutions are deeply dependent on humans, but with a twist: the existence of social institutions depends on what we do, not on what we think.

February 5 (MONDAY): David Enoch

*ROOM CHANGE - IWC E201

"Against Utopianism: Noncompliance and Multiple Agents"

Abstract: One of the central issues in recent debates over ideal and non-ideal theory (in political philosophy) has been whether it's a shortcoming in a normative theory in political philosophy that it is unlikely to be complied with. I intervene in that debate, arguing that while David Estlund is correct that "But I'm not gonna!" is never a refutation of an ought judgment addressed at the relevant agent, still he's wrong about the most important cases – these are cases of multiple agents, and the fact that *another* agent may not act as they ought to may very well be relevant to what *I* ought to do. Thus, this discussion in political philosophy requires taking a stand on the general moral question – how does the expected violation of some affect the duties of others.

February 9: Nick Stang (University of Toronto)

"Is Kant's Critique of Metaphysics Obsolete?"

Abstract: In the Critique of Pure Reason Kant took himself to have shown that metaphysics of a certain kind is impossible for human beings. However, two hundred years later we find metaphysics flourishing in analytic philosophy. On the one hand analytic metaphysics can seem continuous with early modern rationalism, focusing on many of the same concepts (e.g. grounding, modality) and even the same doctrines (e.g. the principle of sufficient reason, substance monism). On the other hand, analytic metaphysics differs in crucial respects from its pre-Kantian forebears; it is less epistemically ambitious and is not as wedded to its a priori status. Does Kant's critique of metaphysics apply to contemporary analytic metaphysics, or, in the words of Kant's 1790 essay On a discovery, has it been rendered superfluous (entbehrlich)?

February 16   No Talk

February 23   Recess

March 2 Alexis Shotwell (Carleton University)

"Claiming bad kin: Responsibility for a suffering world"

Abstract: Utah Phillips is often quoted as having said: "The Earth is not dying, it is being killed, and those who are killing it have names and addresses." This shift from the passive ("someone is dying") to the active ("this person murders") constellates social relations of suffering and dying on the planet today. Understanding that the bad things that are happening are not accidents but active choices may call on us to take sides and get organized. When we understand what is happening, those of us who benefit from harm and wrong-doing may want to take the side of the oppressed, the murdered, the wounded. We may also respond by disavowing our connection to the people killing the earth and its people and critters. We may try to claim kin relations with the people who are targeted by social relations of racism, rather than claiming kin with the social relations of harm that benefit us. In this paper, I ask what it could mean for white people and settlers who benefit from historical and current effects of chattel slavery, colonialism, racial distributions of environmental devastation, and capitalism to claim kin with the people producing these effects. If we are complicit in the pain of this suffering world, how might we take responsibility for our bad kin?

March 9: Dustin Olson   (Russell Visiting Professor)

"Russell, Reflective Equilibrium, and the Analytic Method"

Abstract: Open any entry on the history of the method of inquiry known as reflective equilibrium (RE) and you are sure to find this view attributed to John Rawls—who named this method in 1951 in his "Outline for a Decision Procedures in Ethics." In turn, you are highly likely to find in this entry that Rawls attributes his discovery of RE to Nelson Goodman's work on induction in Goodman's *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast*. And in very rare cases, one might even hear mention of Pierre Duhem as championing this method in his *The Aim and Structure of Physical Theory*. One name you won't, but I argue you should, find in a list of reflective equilibrium's practitioners is Bertrand Russell.

Much ink has been spilled on Russell's method of analysis, but to date no one has drawn the connection between his method and RE. In his 1907 paper "The Regressive Method of Discovering the Premises of Mathematics," however, Russell clearly lays out a quasi-empirical method of inquiry in mathematics analogous to RE. This method is then consistently employed throughout the rest Russell philosophical program, ultimately finding a place in Russell's final major work in epistemology *Human Knowledge*. It is within this later context that we will assess this method, with special consideration to Russell's RE, and how it might hold up to more recent challenges made against it.

March 16: Michael O'Rourke

"Talking over the fence: Dialogue and integration in interdisciplinary research."

Abstract: Interdisciplinary research is a mode of inquiry that aims to combine different disciplinary perspectives on a common problem. These perspectives are conditioned by values, core beliefs, and ontological commitments, and their combination highlights a variety of conceptual differences among disciplines that are worthy of philosophical investigation. In this talk, I address the nature of this combination, characterizing it as a form of integration. In its sparest form, interdisciplinary integration involves the bringing together of multiple disciplinary inputs to produce a single output, but what this looks like in specific instances varies dramatically from context to context. Important work on the varieties of interdisciplinary integration (e.g., data integration, integration of methods) has been done in the philosophy of science, but I will focus on it in the context of the philosophy of language. Focusing on communication involving collaborating scientists who represent different disciplines, I argue that dialogue functions as an especially powerful epistemic integrator, supporting the integration of epistemic attitudes in specific project contexts.

March 23: Candice Delmas

"In Defense of Uncivil Disobedience."

Abstract: In this paper I want to unseat civil disobedience from its pedestal and make conceptual and normative space for *uncivil* disobedience.