

## 12th In-house Philosophy Graduate Conference

### ABSTRACTS

#### **Aaron Lambert: Just Do It! Intentions, Self-Reference, and Mental Causation**

Abstract: How are we to understand the relation of mental causation whose relata are an intention to act (as cause) on one hand and a bodily movement (as what is caused) on the other? In this discussion I propose considering the 'cause' relatum, the intention to act, as composite. It is composed of a desire (for an outcome), a belief (as to how the outcome is to be achieved via bodily movements), and a self-referential aspect which represents the overall intention to act as the cause of its effect. I also propose considering the effect as composite, being composed of a bodily movement together with the desired outcome which is distinct from the bodily movement. An account of the overall structure of mental causation based on this approach is presented and compared to Searle's account of intentional action. An advantage of my account is that it resolves traditional problems associated with deviant causal chains, free will, and causal exclusion in the philosophy of mind.

#### **Liam Ryan: Squaring A Platonic God**

Divine Aseity is the idea that God does not depend upon anything else, but has eternally existed without any external or prior cause. Divine Simplicity is the idea that God has no parts. Platonism is the view that in addition to created concrete objects, there are uncreated abstract objects just as eternal and necessary as an uncreated God. Platonism poses a challenge to God's aseity and simplicity: either abstract objects are co-eternal in which case they do not depend on God and this is inconsistent with divine aseity, or else they exist in God, and this is inconsistent with divine simplicity. Some theist philosophers, such as William Lane Craig, therefore deny Platonism and the real existence of abstracta. Contra this, some theists wish to maintain theism and Platonism. Can these two views be reconciled? I claim that divine aseity and divine simplicity are compatible with the real existence of abstracta. I reconcile these positions by arguing that abstracta exist in God not as distinct parts, but are subsumed in him in such a way that avoids parthood.

#### **Hongkai Yin: Deductive rules for a syllogistic logic**

I present a (tentative) deductive system for a syllogistic logic which contains propositional logic and many-place relational predicates. The logic can be singled out by omitting names, anaphors, negative and reordered predicates in Ben-Yami's QUARC. I show that (a) the deductive rules in this logic are derivable in QUARC, and that (b) the deductive rules in classical syllogistic are derivable in this logic.

#### **Lászlo Kőszeghy: On the Mind-Dependence of Social Kinds**

According to a recurring view in social ontology, social kinds, such as marriage, cool people, or money, are all somehow dependent upon human mental attitudes. I will consider two formulations of this view: John Searle's idea that the existence of social kinds depends on "collective attitudes" towards the kind and/or its members, and Rebecca Mason's recent proposal that it is essential to social kinds that they exist "because certain mental states exist". I will argue that these proposals are false and trivial, respectively. Against Searle's view, I will

draw on the distinction between constitutive and causal mind-dependence to show that in Searle's construal of social kinds and in subsequent debates around it, constitutive cases have unduly been considered as paradigmatic social kinds. Mason's theory, in turn, seems to be able to accommodate both constitutively and causally mind-dependent social kinds. However, in some cases of the latter (e.g. being poor or destitute or being, unknowingly, a member of the algorithmic category on a social media site), all her view can tell us is that at some point along the causal history of the given kind, "certain mental states" played a significant role in making it the way it is, which will irredeemably inflate our notion of social kinds. Finally, I will provide suggestions as to how to take up the challenge of accommodating causal mind-dependency into our account of social kinds without including too much.

### **Denis Kazankov: Socially Conditioned Beliefs**

Socially conditioned beliefs (SCB) are beliefs that we have formed under the influence of arbitrary social factors, such as our upbringing, education or lucky encounters with some epistemic sources. In this talk, I will tackle the following question: does the very fact that our SCB have been formed under contingent social influences (Contingency Evidence) makes it impossible to hold them rationally? This would be so if Contingency Evidence was the overriding evidence that our SCB are unsafe, i.e., such that even if true, formed by the method which could have easily led us to forming false beliefs instead. I will argue that such a consequence doesn't necessarily follow because insofar as we are able to critically and selectively reflect upon the reasons for retaining our SCB, countervailing evidence confirming their safety is in principle accessible to us. I will argue that while the given evidence is often difficult to acquire, it can be at least as strong as Contingency Evidence.

### **Zsolt Kapelner: Disagreement, democracy, and power over others**

It is often suggested that democracy is the only acceptable solution to the following problem: in modern pluralistic societies there is deep and persistent disagreement regarding the basic norms that should govern social cooperation, and yet, such rules must be made for social cooperation to be possible. It is, then, argued the only fair and effective way to make these rules is by giving an equal weight to all disagreeing voices in the decision-making process, i.e., democracy. However, I argue, that the fact of deep and persistent disagreement not only does not select democracy as a uniquely suitable solution for the problem of public rulemaking, it also actively speaks against it. For democracy involves endowing ordinary citizens with some measure of public authority; in a democracy, citizens are co-rulers of their polity, that is, they are ultimate decision-makers on political matters and wield power over each other. But at first sight, it seems, under the condition of deep and persistent disagreement, each citizen has legitimate complaints against being under the partial but permanent rule of others with whom she deeply and persistently disagrees precisely on those matters that pertain to how public power should be wielded. Under such conditions, it appears that the random distribution and frequent reallocation of power may be more appropriate. So deep and persistent disagreement hinders, rather than helps the justification of democracy. How can, then, democratic citizens' power over each other be justified against the background of deep and persistent disagreement? One possible answer appeals to the idea of public reason. However, some, e.g., so-called agonistic democrats, argue that disagreement in society is in fact so deep and persistent that precludes all appeal to public reason. Furthermore, it may seem rather implausible that citizens may only appeal to public reason in exercising their democratic

powers. But even if this is a legitimate expectation, citizens may reasonably worry about other each other's inability to reliably identify public reasons, and that their private opinions, with which they disagree, routinely infiltrate their exercise of democratic power, which may be thought of as sufficient ground for rejecting being under the partial rule of other citizens. In contrast with the public reason strategy, I argue that to justify democratic rule for citizens under the condition of deep and persistent disagreement, citizens' exercise of democratic power must be demonstrably governed by principles of active benevolence. I explain how this solution can overcome the aforementioned problems and try to indicate certain elements of institutional design that may be necessary for implementing it.

### **Dilara Boga: Artificial moral agency: the case of emotions**

The discussion on the criteria of moral agency for artificial intelligences (AIs) has become one of the significant issues for machine ethics. If AIs are moral agents, then they have moral responsibility. Having moral responsibility means that the moral agent can be morally blamed or praised. While social relationists claim that humans can already decide whether 'social' AIs are moral agents or morally responsibility without caring about certain properties (Gunkel 2012; 2018a; 2018b; Coeckelbergh 2009; 2010), on the other hand moral realists support that AIs do not have moral agency because they lack certain properties, such as consciousness and sentience (Torrance 2008; Véliz 2021), mental states (Nyholm 2020), autonomy and personhood (Hakli and Mäkelä 2016; 2019), intentionality (Himma 2009), and moral intentionality (Johnson 2006). Moral realists do not agree on *which* property is necessary for moral agency. Here in this paper, I will claim that the property AIs lack, related to morality, is emotion. Emotions motivate moral actions, moral decisions use emotions, and moral problems can arise from emotions. When moral agents face blameworthy or praiseworthy actions, they have emotions. These emotions are reactive and reciprocal (inter-agential) (Strawson 1962), so that they are constitutive of moral agency. Care robots of hospitals, killer robots of the army, surveillance robots (e.g., Amazon Alexa), domestic robots (e.g., iRobot Roomba) do not have emotions, therefore they are not moral agents, they are just moral 'tools'.

### **Ruben Noorloos: An Argument for Mind-Body Parallelism**

Mind-body parallelism is the view that corresponding mental and physical phenomena have corresponding causal explanations. This paper presents a clarification and defense of this view. While parallelism is often taken to be a thesis about the causal relations of mental and physical states, I will argue that it is also motivated by concerns about explanation. The central problem that parallelism responds to is the familiar one that an (explanatory) non-reductionism about the mind appears to be incompatible with a naturalistic view of the mind. Parallelism presents one possible way of reconciling these two commitments. In my talk, after distinguishing between several versions of the view, I will give an argument that shows how parallelism follows from some commonly held premises. I will also connect it to the historical parallelists Spinoza and Leibniz and argue that common objections to the view are inconclusive.

### **James Luong: Volatile Epistemology**

Memes are expressions of ideas that are typically instantiated as static image macros (combinations of images and text) circulated on social media. Memes have been used to tell jokes, parody, influence elections (Diresta 2018), articulate lived experiences (Dahanayake 2018), and instigate pointless debates, among countless other illocutionary purposes. The use of memes to convey (typically humorous) propositions masks layers of semantic complexity (Zharova 2018) and revolutionary speaker-audience dynamics. That is to say, memes offer a uniquely accessible platform: they are very easy to make, and their propagative success is virtually independent of auctorial identity (Luong 2018). Furthermore, multiple layers of meaning can be coded into a meme through composition, symbolism, typeface, or other aesthetic motifs as well as non-visual cues such as wordplay, textual references, or group signalling. It is perhaps for these reasons that memes have enjoyed widespread adoption in myriad & disparate discourse communities. From filmmaking to palaeontology, chess to urban planning (& more), memes are ubiquitous, yet we still don't understand them. Or, worse, we take them to be the innocuous flotsam of public forums. But what is there to be said about memetic testimony? In what ways can memes teach us, & in what ways can they mislead us? What difference does «meme literacy» make to the impact of memes? & how do memes differ from previous «multimodal» forms of communication? I propose to answer these questions by assessing the aesthetic, semantic, linguistic, epistemic, & discursive features of memes. I will argue that memes can function as a form of testimony— under certain conditions, memes can serve as vectors for epistemic states such as understanding. At the same time, however, this same transitivity makes possible the broad dissemination of misunderstanding. These already considerable stakes are furthermore compounded by the volatile nature of memes. Memes have quickly become a dominant and pervasive force in the modern linguasphere (me.me 2018). As consumers of memes, we must pursue a social epistemology of memes— lest we be consumed by them.

### **Yavuz Basoglu: Can Naive Realism Account for High-level Properties in Perception?**

Abstract: Many held that in perceptual experience, we are presented not only with low-level properties such as colours, but also with high-level ones such as natural kinds. For example, it is argued that we see not only something red and round, but also a *tomato*. In this debate, it is mostly assumed that discussions regarding the high-level properties in perception are orthogonal to theories of perception. That is, outcomes of this debate won't affect the debates about the theories of perception. Here, I aim to discuss this claim and explore if naive realism can account for this phenomenon. I try to see if naive realist solutions to the arguments from illusion and from phenomenal variations in low-level perception can be applicable to similar arguments in high-level perception.

### **Emanuelle Tullio: The Dilemma of Selective Experiential Availability**

Some of our experiences are currently unavailable to us. For example, while I have experiences of my current typing, I don't have experiences of my past running. How is this apparently innocent fact to be reconciled with the fact that we are persisting subjects, that is, that we equally exist at different times? If I equally exist at different times, why is it that the experiences of one time and not those of the others are available to me? Call this the dilemma from selective experiential availability. Some philosophers take this dilemma seriously and believe that it forces us to, for example, accept the existence of a privileged present, or reject the

claim that we persist through time. Other philosophers remain unpersuaded. Building on remarks offered by Skow (2015), I will present and briefly discuss two ways of deflating the dilemma that received attention in recent years. According to the first one, the dilemma rests on a mistaken assumption that experiences are available simpliciter, and not in a time-relative fashion. According to the second one, the dilemma rests on an implausible counterfactual commitment to crosstemporal experiences (experiences of different times unified together). On the one hand, I argue that the first way fails, for, at least under a particularly natural understanding of it, the notion of availability at stake in the dilemma is an ultimately tensless notion. On the other hand, I argue that the second way is more promising, for the dilemma can hardly be formulated without resorting to cross-temporal experiences – pace Balashov (2015). Then, building on Spolaore and Torrenço's (2019) recent discussion of the issue, I conclude with some brief remarks about the extent to which a commitment to cross-temporal experiences should be considered plausible.

### **Yufeng Fei: Direct Realism and the Argument from Illusion -- A Critical Discussion**

In this work I set out to investigate the meaning of direct perception (DR). In my view, indirect perception (IdR) claims that we have perceptual experiences in virtue of directly perceiving something else. Therefore I first discuss theories of IdR, including the sense-dáta theory and Adverbialism. I propose that these theories do not establish a satisfactory relationship between objects and our phenomenal qualities. I then move on to introduce Openness as necessary, and Transparency as sufficient conditions for DR. Lastly I discuss the argument from illusion that aims to refute DR by rejecting Openness and Transparency. I conclude that although the argument puts the truth of Transparency into question, it does not refute Openness, therefore DR with Openness as a necessary condition can be preserved.

### **Vladimir Lazurca: Deciphering noises or understanding voices: two approaches to communication and their consequences for understanding others.**

In this talk I will present what I call a 'translational theory of understanding' or TTU, a view held by various philosophers in the past and still en vogue today in certain circles. TTU can be summarized in the thesis that 'to understand is to translate'. I will claim that TTU is a coherent and defensible position and will defuse some common criticisms against it. In the process I will also refine the thesis for TTU. My ambition is to present this position in its most favorable light, not only to see all its ramifications, but so that it may be attacked on several fronts. In the second part of my talk, I will develop a Gadamerian alternative to TTU, centered on the concept of agreement, as it operates within Gadamer's hermeneutics. I will develop this account as an attack on the refined thesis of TTU. Finally, in the third part, I will examine some of the consequences of this view, in particular with respect to the concept of 'the other'.

### **Neil Kulkarni: A Principled Non-Relativistic Case for Cultural Pluralism and Toleration**