

## 13th In-House Graduate Conference

CEU, Vienna, 25th October 2022

### ABSTRACTS

**Cathy Mason (Keynote)**

#### **Iris Murdoch on Purpose and Play in Art and Ethics**

Imitative poets, Plato claimed, would not be welcome in the ideal city-state (*Republic*, Bk X). This hostility seems to rest on a truth-oriented conception of the purpose and value of art. Art, Plato worries, *seems* to be truthful, but is in fact concerned with mere appearances and made without understanding its subject. Art thus makes a claim to truth but in fact has no firm connection to it. One way to affirm the value of art in the face of these kinds of worry would be to deny this conception of art. Art, one might think, is not the kind of thing that aims at truth, but instead *only* valued with reference to the aesthetic pleasures we get from engaging with it. On this picture art becomes mere ‘play’, as Iris Murdoch puts it (*The Sovereignty of Good*). In this talk, I examine Murdoch's attempts to find a middle course between these positions, suggesting that there is a close connection between art and truth but that this affirms art's value and justifies its role in our lives. As such, she regards artistic activity as closely analogous to, and perhaps an instance of, moral activity. Moreover, she makes the puzzling and hitherto unexplored suggestion that this offers an answer to the perennially troubling question ‘Why be moral?’. The ‘pointlessness’ we find in morality is, she suggests, parallel to that which we find in art (not games) and in both art and morality we must affirm the value in question despite the fact that this value does not serve any further purpose.

#### **Student Presentations:**

**Emanuele Tullio**

#### **Inheritance Temporalism: Sketching a Novel Temporalist Approach**

Standard perdurantism is tied together with two interlaced theses. According to the first, temporal parts are more fundamental than the mereological whole – the ‘worm’ – that they compose. According to the second, temporal parts are the primary bearers of the properties instantiated by worms: a worm derivatively instantiates the properties had by its temporal parts – informally, the worm *inherits* the properties of its temporal parts. I shall consider two fundamentally different approaches to inheritance: an

*eternalist* one and a *temporalist* one. Relatedly, I shall observe that, to these different approaches, correspond substantially different versions of perdurantism. Upon reviewing these versions of perdurantism, I shall argue that one of them, which I label *primitive temporalist perdurantism*, is particularly interesting and worthy of exploration. Primitive temporalist perdurantism, in fact, provides the grounds for a relatively new temporalist picture of time. In a nutshell, according to such a picture the passage of time consists in a transition in what properties a perduring worm inherits from its temporal parts. I shall argue that a theory of this sort has a number of attractions. In particular, I shall contend that it promises to elude an important objection which is commonly raised against competing temporalist theories, the *objection from special relativity theory*.

**Denis Kazankov**

### **Conceptual Engineering and The Wrong Kind of Reasons**

There is an extensive discussion in meta-ethics about the so-called *wrong kind of reasons*. These can be characterised as those considerations for performing an action or forming an attitude which fail to bear on its internal standards of correctness. For example, the fact that an evil demon threatens to punish me unless I admire him might count broadly in favour of admiring him but is still a wrong kind of reason for doing so because it is unrelated to the relevant features that the internal standards of admiration require the demon to have to be admirable. Mona Simion (2018) has recently attempted to identify the wrong kind of reasons for engineering concepts. She argues that concepts are epistemic tools whose central function is to represent the world without epistemic loss and, therefore, to engineer concepts in response to the non-epistemic considerations that translate into epistemic loss is to engineer them for the wrong kind of reasons.

The objective of my talk is to show that Simion's argument is unsuccessful. My talk is structured as follows. Firstly, I will argue that Simion is wrong to assume that the claim that concepts are representational tools entails that they are epistemic tools because representation may also serve a lot of non-epistemic purposes. Next, I will show that Simion cannot justify the primacy of epistemic considerations on the grounds that the concepts that represent the world without epistemic loss are the most metaphysically 'joint carving' ones. Lastly, I will argue that even if Simion's assumption is correct, it is dubious whether the considerations that bear on the internal standards of conceptual engineering are only those that conform to the central function of concepts. Contrary to Simion, I will argue that the internal standards of engineering a concept recommend associating such a semantic content with it which enables it to

fulfil its central function satisfactorily but only to the extent to which this function makes it an all-things-considered valuable representational tool.

**László Kószeghy**

### **What Does it Mean to be Google-Married? Social Kinds without Mind-Dependence**

An influential position in social ontology holds that it is a necessary condition for social categories, such as money, marriage or university, that they are mind-dependent in the sense that their existence depends on our mental attitudes toward them. Call this view attitude-dependence of the social (ADS). In this talk, I provide a counterexample to ADS by making the case that analytic social ontology unduly neglects socially significant classifications of people and objects generated by machines. The structure of the talk is as follows. I first give an exposition of ADS theories and the putative counterexamples that were devised by their critics. I, then, argue that machine-generated categories – used, for instance, in insurance and credit scores, advertising, recommendations, search results etc. – are *social* categories. Then I show that these machine-generated categories are merely causally mind-dependent and as such present an even stronger case against ADS than hitherto devised counterexamples.

**Yaren Duvarci**

### **Can Free Will Exist in a Physicalist's World**

My aim in this talk is to explore the connection between the free will problem and the mind-body problem, specifically free will and physicalism. Christian List describes free will as a three-part capacity: the capacity to act intentionally, to choose between alternative possibilities, and to control one's actions. Following the work of List, I clarify these three requirements for free will: intentional agency, alternative possibilities, and causal control. Then I take three standard versions of physicalism, i.e. eliminative, reductive, and non-reductive, and see whether the requirements for free will are compatible with them.

I argue that all types of physicalism I describe lead to problematic results if we accept that there is free will. By touching on issues like supervenience, causal overdetermination, emergence and randomness, I conclude with a conditional argument. That is if there is free will, we have reason to deny physicalism.

**Jay Luong**

**Mind, Matter, & More: Levels of Explanation as a Means of Reconciling Naturalism & Anti-reductivism in the Study of Mind**

To say that something is reductive is normally to say that something has been oversimplified. *Reductivism* usually means that important details have been left out in the pursuit of simplicity. In philosophical discussions, reduction is a question of what is fundamental— that is, what is more basic, constitutive, or necessary (van Riel & van Gulick 2019). In this talk, I propose to interrogate interdisciplinarity as concerns the study of mind & brain. This theoretical landscape is framed by two sensible but seemingly opposed ideals. These are, in a nutshell: **anti-reductivism**, which is committed to the autonomy of different disciplinary perspectives & practices, & **naturalism**, which confers some sort of authority to the scientific disciplines. My task herein is to probe this apparent tension, thereby spelling out these notions in greater detail.

A promising way of attempting to reconcile these divergent commitments is to distinguish between different «**levels of explanation**». According to this meta-theory, the mind can be described at varying levels of abstraction, & indeed, this is what the different disciplines do. This approach recognises the value of different levels of explanation in achieving a holistic understanding of the mind, thereby opening a way towards the syncretisation of anti-reductivist & naturalist sentiments. I begin by surveying the philosophical origins of the notion of levels of explanation. I then compare & contrast different models of the various levels as applied to the mind (Marr 1982, 25; Dennett 1987, 43-68; Pietrazewski & Wertz 2021). I will conclude by raising questions for the general strategy of levels of explanation.

At the end of the day, I hope to show that: (1) naturalism does not necessarily entail the subordination of philosophy to science in the study of mind; (2) anti-reductivism must be squared with a historical critique of the essences of academic disciplines; & (3) appealing to levels of explanation in order to mitigate the opposition between naturalism & anti-reductivism incurs the burden of giving an account of how different levels relate to one another. This problem agenda is especially suited to philosophical analysis, granted the indispensability of interdisciplinary sensibility. It is my hope that the discussions herein will contribute towards overcoming the paralytic opposition between naturalism & anti-reductivism, & towards new frontiers in the study of mind & brain.

**Hongkai Yin**

### **A Decision Procedure for the Relational Syllogistic with Reorder**

The Relational Syllogistic is an extension of Aristotle's logic where relational predicates are introduced into the language. We can in addition introduce singular terms and reordered forms of relational predicates to make it more expressive. In this talk we present a formal system for the Relational Syllogistic (with singular arguments and reordered predicates), which is exactly the Quantified Argument Calculus where anaphora is excluded, we describe a tableau algorithm which is sound and complete, and we sketch a decision procedure for the satisfiability problem.

**Yavuz Recep Başoğlu**

### **On Twin Earth-like Arguments against High-Level Perception**

According to high-levelism, one can be perceptually aware of not only low-level properties such as colors and shapes but also high-level properties such as natural kind properties, artifactual kind properties, facial and bodily properties, emotional expressions, and so on. Against this view, some have developed arguments akin to the Twin Earth Argument. In response to Twin Earth-like arguments, some high-levelists claim that endorsing what I shall call the high-level mental paint view saves high-levelism against these arguments. In this paper, (i) I argue that Bayne and Siegel's response to Twin Earth-like argument against high-levelism is not only unsuccessful but also leads to a wholesale rejection of high-levelism, and lastly, (ii) I will briefly sketch a reasonable response to the argument high-levelists shall endorse.

**Emily Kay Williamson**

### **Literary Thought Experiments as a Source of Knowledge**

My talk addresses the possibility of cognitive gain from fictional literature. As a lover of literature, I have often had the experience of reading a book and feeling that I have learnt a great deal from doing so. Some of my strongest convictions about the world, my place in it and the way things ought to be have been shaped and perhaps even totally caused by reading fiction. Despite this, fictional literature is not often heralded as a key mode of learning about the world. When one thinks about sources of knowledge, the practices that come to mind are likely scientific experiments, non-fiction texts or direct observation. In this talk, I will challenge this intuition by

arguing that not only is literature a source of knowledge comparable to these, but it is also a unique source through which one can learn new facts about the world that cannot be gained in any other way. I begin by reframing the literary cognitivism debate before exploring the notion of literature as thought experiment. I critically examine two views that make use of this idea and synthesise compelling elements of each of the views in constructing my own theory of propositional cognitivism. The kernel of my view is that some works of fictional literature, by being thought experiments, are a unique source of propositional knowledge.

**Henrique Mendes Gonçalves**

### **Embodiment and Representation: Language and the Hard Problem of Content**

Within the framework of enactive approaches to cognition and mentality, radical embodied cognition (REC) is a methodological program that attempts to make sense of what has been called “basic minds” in the literature—i.e., minds running online, environmentally situated cognitive processes like perception and coordinated action—while completely eliminating notions such as representation and mental content from their explanation. It is therefore antagonistic to more traditional computationalist approaches, which explain these phenomena in terms of computation over symbolic representations. In its defense, Hutto and Myin have presented what they call the “hard problem of content,” which attempts to show that explanations for online cognition involving representational content are not only unnecessary, but perhaps even impossible. However, the authors have been extensively criticized for their double standard when dealing, on the one hand, with online cognitive processes such as perception and action and, on the other, with language, a much more “representation-hungry” cognitive domain. Milkowski believes that, if they extend their analysis to “linguistic minds,” they actually run the risk of semantic nihilism—the view that there are no satisfaction conditions to linguistic utterances. I will argue here that this does not need to be the case if one opts for more pragmatic approaches to linguistic meaning that do not rely on metasemantic concepts such as reference and satisfaction.

**Nikhil Mahant**

### **On what Words are**

Words are ubiquitous. We use them to communicate and store information, elicit and perform actions, to evoke memories and emotions. Much of our social, political, and

intellectual life is premised on words: the knowledge generated by the sciences is codified in words, and words are the medium of creative expression in literature and the arts.

Rather surprisingly then, the question of *what are words* has attracted the attention of philosophers and linguists only recently. And much of the contemporary discussion on this topic has developed in one of two directions. First, some philosophers have proposed metaphysical accounts of words using the categories that are used to explain the ontology of objects more generally. Second, in line with some broader developments within philosophy, another set of philosophers have expressed scepticism about the possibility or fruitfulness of a single metaphysical account of words, and argued for a *plurality* of such accounts, each designed to serve a specific purpose.

However, not enough attention has been paid to examining the metaphysical assumptions about words—made knowingly or unknowingly—in broader debates within theoretical semantics and the philosophy of language. In this talk, I will present my research plan for the coming 3-4 years. My future research is motivated by the optimism and enthusiasm that a metaphysical investigation of words promises to provide new insights and solutions to some of the most pressing problems within philosophy and linguistics. Some such problems that I shall briefly discuss include the problem of deep and pervasive disagreement among theorists concerning the semantics of names, definite descriptions, and other singular terms; the longstanding debate between internalism and externalism about linguistic meaning; and some foundational issues concerning the relationship between language, mind, and reality (including rigidity, direct reference, and singular thought.)

## **Bálint Békefi**

### **Oppy on the Failure of 'Derivations' in the Philosophy of Religion**

Graham Oppy is a prominent philosopher of religion and an atheist. He has argued against the common practice of presenting arguments from various premises to the conclusion either that God exists or that God does not exist. He objects that we should expect well-developed atheistic and theistic philosophical theories to be consistent, i.e., not committed to premises which entail the opposite view. But if well-developed atheistic philosophical theories are not committed to the premises of theistic arguments, then those arguments fail (and vice versa).

I explore two defenses of 'derivations' against Oppy's critique. First, Oppy's notion of well-developed philosophical theories is idealized in the sense that the philosophical theories people actually espouse are not comprehensive and not always consistent. Derivations may therefore be useful in developing these theories--in identifying previously unrecognized theses for atheists and theists to adopt or abandon. Second, some pre-theoretical, external standards--e.g., psychological predisposition or cognitive teleology--may privilege some premises over their negations, and there may be a sense in which derivations from externally privileged premises are successful even if not always persuasive.

I argue that the first defense clearly succeeds in achieving a modest goal, while the second defense aspires to a more ambitious goal, but its success is unclear. I further argue that Oppy's approach may be accurately characterized as equilibrist, but something like the second defense is required for equilibrists rationally to hold to their positions in the face of widespread disagreement.

## **Maria Fedorova**

### **Are 'Phenomenal Beliefs' Beliefs?**

In this paper, I attempt to challenge the self-representationalist approach to phenomenal knowledge defended by Horgan & Kriegel (2007). Phenomenal knowledge is knowledge of phenomenally conscious experiences. The subject's experience is phenomenally conscious (P-conscious) if there is something it is like for her to have this experience (e.g., what-it's-likeness of chest pain). Horgan & Kriegel endorse (self-)representationalism about P-consciousness.

On the self-representationalist view, P-conscious experiences are self-representing, i.e., not only do they represent their content (e.g., irises in a vase) but also themselves (e.g., visually experiencing irises in a vase). The self-representing nature of P-conscious experience underlies the phenomenal belief formation process. One forms a phenomenal belief by redirecting her attention from the experience's content to the experience itself. According to Horgan & Kriegel, since the content of phenomenal belief is exhausted by what-it's-likeness, all phenomenal beliefs so defined are infallible, i.e., necessarily true. This is what makes phenomenal knowledge a special kind of self-knowledge. I argue against Horgan & Kriegel's version of self-representationalism about phenomenal knowledge. I contend that Horgan & Kriegel impose insufficient cognitive demands on the phenomenal belief formation process. There is nothing special about phenomenal knowledge as no phenomenal knowledge of the sort is formed under self-representationalism once we unveil its



vehicles:[1]phenomenal belief &[2]the attention shift. I neglect the notion of phenomenal belief by advocating a sharp distinction between occurrent judgements and standing states such as beliefs. Following Carruthers (2015) & Crane (2013), I endorse the view that beliefs are never conscious and, therefore, neither are beliefs occurrent. Further, I motivate the rejection of the distinction between focal and peripheral inner awareness (which is at the core of self-representationalism). I claim that the attention shift merely evokes another P-conscious experience, thereby undermining the distinction at issue. Hence, I conclude that the attention shift is insufficient for the formation of any doxastic attitude about the phenomenal character of one's experience, including that of occurrent judgement.