UNLV

PHILOSOPHY COLLOQUIUM SERIES

FALL 2022

1. Friday September 23, 2022, 3:00pm in CBC C122
"The Politics of Ontology: Why Philosophy Should Care about the Paranormal."
Kimberly Engels, Dept. of Philosophy, Molloy University

In a recent conference at Rice University called "Archives of the Impossible," when speaking about the new research archives on paranormal phenomena at Rice, Jeffrey Kripal stated, "Such a project is based on the wager that new theory lies hidden in the anomalous, that the paranormal appears in order to mock and shock us out of our present normal thinking. Seen in this way, psychical and paranormal phenomena become the still unacknowledged, unassimilated Other of modern thought, the still unrealized future of theory, the fleeing signs of a consciousness not yet become culture." Paranormal phenomena, such as UFO sightings, close encounters, telepathic communication, apparitions, etc., have long been seen as unrespectable topics of academic discourse. In this paper I argue this is due to what Harvard psychiatrist John E. Mack called "the politics of ontology" – in which a concentrated elite group establish what kind of things can and cannot happen in society, and what phenomena or experiences can be considered real. In the context of the Western academy, we have established that extraterrestrial encounters are things that simply do not occur, that interdimensional cryptids do not exist, that parapsychology is a "pseudoscience", that apparitions of loved ones or revered figures must be hallucinations or mistakes/coincidences, and that UFOs are either nothing at all, or nothing special. I argue that not only are paranormal experiences worthy of being taken seriously, but that philosophy as a discipline should be leading the charge. Specifically, I show how the existential and phenomenological tradition is especially well suited for examining paranormal phenomena and experiences, as those with paranormal experiences find themselves face to face with an Other who is unaccounted for and believed by mainstream society not to exist.

2. Friday October 7, 2022, 3:00pm in CBC C122
"Stories and Understanding."
Todd Jones, Dept. of Philosophy, University Nevada Las Vegas

Among the most common suggestions one hears about how to improve pedagogy is for teachers to recast the information they are teaching into a *narrative story* form. In this talk, I argue that student *understanding* likely *is* improved by putting information into this form (even if student *knowledge* is not). Still, there are some disadvantages of the story form. This talk discusses how to maximize these advantages while minimizing the disadvantages of the story form.

3. **Friday, October 21, 2022, 3:00pm in CBC C122**
   "Interpersonal Algorithmic Injustice: The Role of Algorithms in Amplifying Epistemic Injustice and Social Distrust On- and Offline."
   Heather Stewart, Dept. of Philosophy, Oklahoma State University

   In recent years, much has been made of the problem of "algorithmic injustice" and the related problem of "algorithmic oppression." These concepts seek to illuminate and explain the role of algorithms in exacerbating certain types of injustice (e.g., economic injustice, housing injustice, health injustice, and injustice within the criminal justice system). Within this growing conversation about "algorithmic injustice," the focus has generally been at the "macro" level: algorithms reproducing discriminatory hiring practices, algorithms generating discriminatory decisions for mortgages or credit lending, algorithms generating biased predictions about the likelihood of recidivism in criminal justice contexts, and the like. While this "macro" level perspective, focused primarily on the use of algorithms in various types of institutional-level decision-making procedures, is undoubtedly important, there remains more to uncover about the role of algorithms in perpetuating social injustice. Specifically, more analysis of the influence of algorithms on our daily, interpersonal interactions (e.g., on social media and in real-life (offline) conversations with others, influenced as they are by social media) is needed. In this talk, I explore some of this undertheorized domain, arguing that a robust accounting of the injustice and oppression that algorithms cause must also include analysis of the seemingly subtle ways in which algorithms influence our social worlds and daily interpersonal interactions with others. Focusing on the role of algorithms on social media specifically, I argue that two algorithmic processes – *algorithmic targeting* and *algorithmic sorting* – contribute to the further distortion of our social and epistemic worlds, worsening problems of epistemic injustice and oppression and related problems of social distrust.

4. **Friday, November 4, 2022, 3:00pm in CBC C122**
   "What is the Problem of Classical Recapture?"
   Roy Cook, Dept. of Philosophy, University of Minnesota – Twin Cities

   A number of problems and projects in the philosophy of logic (especially the semantic paradoxes) have led many scholars working in this area to reject classical logic in favor of a weaker non-classical logic that does not support the distinctively classical reasonings that lead to paradox. Rejecting classical logic, however, requires either (i) arguing that classical logic is somehow still okay in standard mathematical and scientific contexts, or (ii) arguing that the bulk of work in contemporary mathematics and science is, because of its implicit acceptance of classical principles, mistaken. Most scholars working in this area have (quite reasonably) opted for the first option (e.g., Beall, Rosenblatt, Murzi, Rossi, etc.). But, as I will argue, they have for the most part made a *different* mistake in supposing that the defense of classical reasoning in non-paradoxical contexts is a project within the *philosophy of logic*, rather than in the philosophy of mathematics or the philosophy of science. This is not merely an issue of policing the boundaries of various sub-disciplines within philosophy: on the contrary, different sub-disciplines use different concepts and techniques, and as a result there are strategies for defending the use and utility of (apparently) classical principles in mathematics and science that have been ignored or missed as a result.

5. **Friday, November 18, 2022, 3:00pm in CBC C122**
   "Idealization in Greek Geometry."
   Justin Humphreys, Dept. of Philosophy, Villanova University

Some philosophers hold that a fundamental epistemic norm is that we ought to believe our best scientific theories. What is it about a theory that rationally requires us to believe it? Focusing on the case of ancient Greek geometry, in this talk I argue that a theory can command belief through idealization, a deliberate manipulation of observed facts that increases the epistemic resources of that theory, namely its explanatory power or tractability. Drawing on three examples from Ancient Greek geometry, I argue that intentionally incorrect representations of phenomena can contribute to a correct understanding of those phenomena and allow us to make otherwise impossible predictions about them. The lesson is that questioning the epistemic norm need not be met with fist banging: offering an account of how idealization works makes the epistemic norm plausible, without directly appealing to that norm. This talk should be of interest to those working in ancient philosophy and in philosophy of science, as well as to philosophers and scientists who are open to thinking about epistemological problems from an historical point of view.

6. **Friday, December 2, 2022, 3:00pm in CBC C122**
   "Carnap's Politically Engaged Logical Pluralism."
   Noah Friedman-Biglin, Dept. of Philosophy, San Jose State University

The thought that we can be 'pluralist' about logic – that there are many formal systems, each of which has a claim at being 'logic' properly so called – has received quite a bit of recent attention. The locus classicus of this view, since the earliest days of analytic philosophy, can be found in Carnap's 'principle of tolerance'. Clarifying the principle of tolerance is the focus of this first section of this paper. There, I will argue that the principle should be understood as widely as possible and highlight some of the more radical conclusions that Carnap draws. In section two, I discuss the reasons Carnap has for adopting this brand of pluralism and argue that they are based in the Vienna Circle's "Scientific World-Conception" – a platform of philosophical commitments which set the direction for the Circle's philosophical investigations as well as a program of social change. What emerges from this discussion is the often-ignored relationship between his logical pluralism and his political views. Finally, in section three, I turn to the post-World War 2 political situation in the United States and discuss the reasons that Carnap might have had for distancing himself from – or at least de-emphasizing – the political foundations of his views.

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