UNLV

PHILOSOPHY COLLOQUIUM SERIES

SPRING 2023

1. Friday, January 20, 2023, 3:00pm in CBC C113
"Values as Vectors."
Daniel Muñoz, Dept. of Philosophy, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Often, when two things are tied in goodness, just barely improving one won't break the tie. (Perhaps coffee and tea are tied regardless of whether the coffee comes at a 5c discount.) How is this sort of thing possible? Many say that values would have to be imprecise, giving rise to a special nontransitive value relation, which Chang calls parity. But parity is notoriously hard to pin down, and imprecise values, I argue, are a poor fit for the job, both formally and philosophically. I propose instead to represent values as many-dimensional vectors, where each dimension represents how good a thing is in a certain respect. The result is a fresh and flexible framework for the stranger side of ethics—as well as an elegant definition of parity.

2. Friday, February 3, 2023, 3:00pm in CBC C113
"Extremism without Extremists."
Josh DiPaolo, Dept. of Philosophy, California State University, Fullerton

What is extremism? A prominent philosophical analysis develops a three-part distinction between ideological, methods, and mindset extremists. However, this analysis fails to do justice to the complex relationships between extremism, behavior, and the mind. In particular, the problem with this analysis resembles problems associated with traditional accounts of racism and sexism. Racism, for example, has been thought to be a state of mind of the racist, sexism a state of mind of the sexist. But racism and sexism are not limited to racists and sexists. Similarly, I argue that extremism is not limited to extremists. Extremism can manifest in the absence of extremists. Drawing on examples of incel extremism and the extremism described in Tara Westover's memoir Educated, I develop a more attractive account of the connections between extremism, behavior, and the mind.

3. **Friday, February 17, 2023, 3:00pm in CBC C113**
   "Nonclassical Logic and Skepticism."
   Adam Marushak, Institute for Science, Technology, and Society, South China Normal University

This talk introduces a novel strategy for responding to skeptical arguments based on the epistemic possibility of error. I show that nonclassical logics motivated by recent work on epistemic modals can be used to render such skeptical arguments invalid. That is, one can grant that knowledge is incompatible with the possibility of error and grant that error is possible, all while avoiding the skeptic's conclusion that we lack knowledge.

4. **Friday, March 3, 2023, 3:00pm in CBC C113**
   "Philosophy of Mind: A Conceptual "Goldmine" for Machine Learning?"
   Alessandra Buccella, Institute for Interdisciplinary Brain and Behavioral Sciences, Chapman University

Even though artificial intelligence has been connected to philosophy (and cognitive science) since its early days, the relatively "young" field of machine learning adds an intriguing new layer to the relationship among these disciplines. In this talk, I discuss two domains of machine learning research in which philosophical theories and concepts can help find innovative solutions to common problems. The first domain in which I believe philosophy of mind can provide machine learning developers with helpful insights is computer vision. In particular, I argue that ideas coming from the phenomenological tradition, such as Merleau-Ponty's notion of "style", can inspire the design of better machine learning algorithms for object recognition across a variety of contexts and modifications (e.g., changes in illumination, visual angle, distance, etc.). The second domain is that of so-called "Trustworthy AI". Here, I argue that, in order for users without technical knowledge about machine learning to trust these systems, the latter must have the ability to construct and articulate functional explanations for their outputs that can play the (normative) role of reasons.

5. **Friday, March 31, 2023, 3:00pm in CBC C113**
   "Women, Spirit, and Authority in Plato and Aristotle."
   Patricia Marechal, Dept. of Philosophy, University of California, San Diego

In this talk, I provide an interpretation of Plato's repeated claims in *Republic* V that women are "weaker" (*asthenestera*) than men. Specifically, I argue that Plato thinks women have a psychological propensity to get easily dispirited, which makes them less effective in implementing and executing their rational decisions. This interpretation achieves several things. It qualifies Plato's position regarding women and their position in the polis. It provides the background against which we can interpret Aristotle's claim in *Politics* I that women possess a deliberative capacity that is not authoritative (*akuron*). It expands our understanding of the nature and role of spirit (*thumos*) in these authors. And, finally, it gives us insight into a kind of moral-psychological success that Plato and Aristotle consider central to both personal and political agency.

6. **Friday, April 14, 2023, 3:00pm in CBC C113**
   "Radicalizing Practical Representations."
   Alison Springle, Dept. of Philosophy, University of Oklahoma

Philosophers and cognitive scientists have posited practical mental representations (henceforth, "practical representations") to account for a variety of cognitive phenomena. But what exactly are practical representations? "Conservative views" claim that they are types of propositional representations while more popular "modest views" claim that they are non-propositional, though not radically non-propositional, representations. I argue that conservative views incur a heavy explanatory loss and that, perhaps surprisingly, modest views don't fare much better. The latter also inherit an explanatory burden that conservative views and "radical views" of practical representation could avoid. But few have been brave enough to pursue a view on which practical representations are *radically* non-propositional. Millikan's theory of pushmi-pullyu representations (PPRs) is unusually courageous in this respect, but in other crucial respects it remains modest, which, in this context, is not a virtue. To the contrary, the cost of Millikan's modesty includes the conceptual coherence and explanatory power of her theory of PPRs. I introduce the *de agendo* theory of practical representation as an unabashedly radical view of practical representation. I argue that *de agendo* representations are both coherent and explanatorily powerful. I conclude that this radical view of practical representation is worthy of valiant pursuit as it is a plausible and promising alternative to problematic conservative and modest views.

7. **Friday, April 28, 2023, 3:00pm in CBC C113**
   "Grasping Content from the Outside: The Case of the Logical Constants."
   Fabrice Pataut, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Sorbonne Université

In order to either prove or disprove the validity of a logical law, more than a definition of the logical constants occurring in the expression of the law must be given. One needs an argument in favor of the semantics that gives the constants their meaning. How neutral may that semantics be so that no *petitio principii* is involved in the argument to the effect that some meanings must be ruled out and that, as a result, some logical laws turn out to be invalid? Michael Dummett urges that a full-blooded semantics that gives a non-circular explanation of the concepts expressed by the most primitive terms is what we should be looking for. Unfortunately, as far as intuitionistic logic is concerned, Beth trees fail to provide the required result because there is no way to make sure that all closed formulas are verified at any given node of a Beth tree. Dummett's conclusion is that, as far a neutrality is concerned, the explanation of the meaning of the constants in terms of Beth trees is as circular as the classical one in terms of, say, introduction and elimination rules. Although John McDowell's rejoinder is only indirectly concerned with the intuitionistic case, his plea for a modest semantics in which meaning or content may only be grasped "from the inside," so that the meaning of the most primitive concepts is taken for granted, clearly applies to the case of the constants, in particular to the cases of disjunction and negation.

I shall argue against Dummett that, in the classical case, some fairly minimum presupposition may be achieved concerning the conceptual resources required to grasp the classical meaning of disjunction and negation, so that full-bloodedness isn't entirely beyond our ken and the defense of excluded middle no longer appears arbitrary. Against McDowell, I shall argue that neither the Dummettian antirealist's stance nor its realist's rejoinder in terms of full-bloodedness need be worked out within the framework of an objectified conception of deductive practices. McDowell's complaint that Dummett's manifestability argument is a "typical piece of Enlightenment objectification," akin to Condillac's views on verbal propensities, is misguided. The defense of excluded middle by way of a grasp of the relevant contents "from the outside" need not be objectified in this sense. Quite the opposite: thoughts will have to play an essential role.

8. **Friday, May 5, 2023, 3:00pm in CBC C113**
   "Why We Need Not Be Threatened by the Repugnant Conclusion."
   Todd Jones and Michael Bishop, Depts. of Philosophy, University of Nevada Las Vegas and Florida State University

Derek Parfit's "Repugnant Conclusion" says that if we consider a thriving population A and a limping population Z (where everyone has low but positive welfare), as long as Z is sufficiently more populous than A, Z is better than A, *ceteris paribus*. We argue that the *ceteris paribus* clause renders the Repugnant Conclusion deeply misleading. Properly understood the Repugnant Conclusion is not a troubling puzzle about (human) population ethics. It is, instead, the product of a flawed, one-dimensional framework for thinking about values. Reject the framework, and the Repugnant Conclusion is repugnant no longer.

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For more information contact the Philosophy Department at: 702-895-3433