



PHILOSOPHY COLLOQUIUM SERIES

FALL 2026

1. Friday, September 11, 2026, 3:00pm in CHB C128

“To Eliminate or Not to Eliminate: The Science and Metaphysics of Non-Existence.”

Todd Jones, Dept. of Philosophy, University of Nevada Las Vegas

A central debate in philosophy of mind continues to be whether developments in neuroscience should convince us to be *eliminativists* regarding folk psychological terms. In a series of recent papers, Bill Ramsey, an eliminativist pioneer, has argued that many scholars have misconstrued what eliminativism really is. Eliminativism, Ramsey argues, should be reserved for claims that some X's *do not exist*. In this talk, however, I argue that what it is to not exist is not clear. When scientists say “X does not exist,” they may mean numerous different things. Saying that we should not eliminate X's unless they do not exist, then, is not enough to demarcate when we should be eliminativists.

2. Friday, September 25, 2026, 3:00pm in CHB C128

“Argument's Peculiar Adversariality.”

John Casey, Dept. of Philosophy, Northeastern Illinois University

This talk proposes a new defense of the thesis that argument is essentially adversarial. While previous defenses of this thesis have centered on the kinds of states beliefs or commitments are, this paper will focus on inference, which is the process that brings these states about. To sketch the core idea: When someone shares reasons with another, they aren't merely offering a menu of options to take or leave; rather, they're attempting to make the other person enact the inference directed. Although inference is something one, in a sense, does, it is not an action (like lifting your arm or singing).

3. Wednesday, October 7, 2026, 3:00pm in BEH 241 [Note the day and place]
“Your Health vs. My Liberty: From Precautionary Principles to Duties to Be Watched and Randomized?”
Nick Byrd, Dept. of Bioethics and Decision Sciences, Geisinger College of Health Sciences

Public health controversies are often oversimplified. A technocrat may treat resistance to expert recommendations as a communication problem. A psychologist may expect identifiable victims to motivate compliance. A philosopher may expect reflection to resolve disagreement. Our empirical research has complicated all three narratives. In pandemic experiments, philosophical disagreement predicted intended compliance more reliably than reflective reasoning or identifiable victims. In moral dilemma studies, reflective reasoning did not support one pattern of ethical decisions over others, but multiple non-overlapping patterns. So strategic communication and reflection may be necessary, but insufficient.

These findings also motivate a more pragmatic, systems-level approach: mitigating major health risks requires that we investigate how consequential health decisions are produced, identify the most promising opportunities to prevent avoidable harms, and run experiments at those decision points. The resulting harm-prevention opportunities (and perhaps the corresponding duties) may be distributed across a surprisingly broad range of people, practices, and institutions.

And frontier technologies are enabling unprecedented scale in experimentation and observation, making systemic pragmatism about health increasingly feasible. Of course, new forms of surveillance and artificial intelligence resurface familiar concerns about seeming tensions between health and liberty. In an age of rapid therapeutic development and ambient intelligence systems, we may not have to sacrifice as much convenience. But do we have to subject ourselves to even more pervasive randomization and observation?

4. Thursday, October 15, 2026, 7:00pm in Campus Resource Center (CRC) Auditorium
[Note the day, time, and place—on Harmon Ave. across from Lied Library]
“Embracing Risk.” [University Forum Lecture]
Alex Honnold, International Rock Climber / The Honnold Foundation, Las Vegas, NV

In modern culture we often regard risk as something to minimize or avoid altogether. This is especially true of risks associated with physical harm or death. Those who don’t embrace the “safety first” maxim are regarded as reckless and irresponsible, irrespective of how they actually navigate danger. Yet this high level of risk-aversion is a recent phenomenon, and it certainly was not the attitude of our Founders who chose to revolt against the British 250 years ago. As someone who has spent much of his life immersed in, managing and thinking about danger and risk, Alex Honnold will explore current attitudes on the subject and on how modern culture may have become overly risk-averse. Rather than try to eliminate even extreme risk, he’ll suggest that perhaps we are overlooking the positive benefit of embracing it and learning to manage it intelligently.

5. Friday, October 23, 2026, 3:00pm in CHB C128
“‘A Splendid Region to Study Philosophy In’: The Letters and Reflections of Horatio Jones, Nevada’s First Philosopher.”
David Beisecker, Dept. of Philosophy, University of Nevada Las Vegas

Early American Hegelianism can be found in some surprising places. One of the most unlikely would surely be Nevada Territory during the American Civil War. In this talk, I present a series of letters that I uncovered and transcribed for *Nevada Historical Quarterly*, written by Horatio McClean Jones while he was territorial court justice for Nevada Territory in the early 1860s. These letters reveal that Jones thought that the resolutions to the most pressing problems for the territory were to be found through a close study of Hegel.

6. Wednesday, November 4, 2026, 3:00pm in BEH 121 [Note the day and place]

“Becoming Black, Becoming Palestinian.”

Zahi Zalloua, Dept. of Indigeneity, Race, and Ethnicity Studies, Whitman College

In the first pages of *The Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. Du Bois meditates on the question, “How does it feel to be a problem?” What makes the question troubling is its ontological quality: what is foregrounded as a problem is not a set of circumstances but being itself. In my talk, I consider how becoming Black or becoming Palestinian transforms you into a particular kind of object: a phobic object, a criminalizable object, or even a genocidable object. These forms of objecthood mark the violent ways racialization and colonial domination structure white ontology, the very grammar of being. Yet alongside these imposed forms, I also imagine objecthood otherwise, not only as a sign of depletion or loss, but as a site of cross-racial solidarity, a militant call for ontological upheavals and psychic divestments, and a refusal of the world’s partitions of being and nonbeing at home and across the globe.

[Co-Sponsored by UNLV Students for Justice in Palestine and the UNLV Muslim Students Association]

7. Friday, November 20, 2026, 3:00pm in CHB C128

“Algorithmic Mysterianism: Or How I Learned to Stop Explaining and Love the Black Box.”

Bill Ramsey, Dept. of Philosophy, University of Nevada Las Vegas

There has been a tremendous amount of attention, analysis, speculation and awe directed at recent developments in artificial intelligence. And yet despite expressions of how mind-blowing these new AI systems are, there is actually reason to think that their radical nature has not been fully appreciated. Specifically, there is motivation for thinking that these networks point to a fundamental discovery about reasoning in general and human reasoning in particular that merits further consideration. The possible discovery is this: There are styles of problem solving and information processing that are completely unintelligible to the human mind. Unlike traditional AI, and indeed, every other invention in human history, the strategies and competencies exhibited by modern AI systems are, in large measure, incomprehensible to us. This is often referred to as the “Black Box” nature of these systems. In this talk, I will put forward a position that I will call “*Algorithmic Mysterianism*”, based upon the account of scientific mysterianism developed by Colin McGinn. McGinn’s position stems from two central premises: 1) if we take seriously the evolutionary development of our cognitive systems, we should expect there to be aspects of reality that we are not cognitively equipped to comprehend, and 2) we have already discovered some aspects of reality that transcend comprehensibility. My view is that we are just now discovering one further part of reality that our faculties cannot comprehend; namely, a style of reasoning that is exhibited by most modern AI systems. In essence, I want to suggest that these systems have revealed to us that there is a form of problem-solving that is currently indecipherable to the human mind. What is fascinating about this dilemma is that it suggests the strategies we normally employ for making sense of things is, itself, incapable of making sense of other strategies for making sense of things.

8. Friday, December 4, 2026, 3:00pm in CHB C128

“Are Adaptive Preferences a Problem for Subjective Theories of Well-Being?”

Chris Heathwood, Dept. of Philosophy, University of Colorado, Boulder

An adaptive preference is one formed or changed in response to what the subject of the preference takes their feasible options to be. The problem of adaptive preferences for some theory of well-being is that the theory appears to generate an intuitively mistaken result about one or more cases of adaptive preference. Against conventional wisdom, I argue that the problem of adaptive preference is not much of a problem for subjective approaches to well-being; and the only subjective theories that it is a problem for are the least plausible versions of subjectivism anyway. This can be shown if we are careful to attend to three crucial distinctions within subjective theories of well-being that most writers on adaptive preference appear insensitive to.

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