

UNLV

PHILOSOPHY COLLOQUIUM

FALL 2019

1. Friday, September 13 3:00pm, BEH 113

"Maternity and Migration."

Amy Reed Sandoval, Department of Philosophy, University of Nevada Las Vegas

Undertaking an internal or international migration while pregnant, miscarrying, and/or raising a child often entails complex personal, political and moral challenges. For instance, for migrants, on a personal level, the physical and emotional stress associated with certain migration experiences may lead to negative pregnancy outcomes like miscarriage, low birth-weight, stillbirth and gestational diabetes. Politically speaking, birthright citizenship, or the right to become a citizen of the country in which one was born regardless of the citizenship status of one's parents, has been attacked relentlessly by anti-immigrant groups in places like the United States, Ireland, and New Zealand, leading to its controversial repeal in the latter two countries. Meanwhile, some of the most morally troubling instances of recent migrant abuse have involved the recent, ongoing separations of migrant children from their parents at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Despite the obvious social and political importance of these questions of "maternity and migration," there is not yet a distinguishable and robust philosophical literature that addresses them directly. There is, however, ample empirical literature and a small set of philosophical articles on this topic, and, additionally, a considerable amount of philosophical work that could be employed to consider the relevant questions from a normative point of a view. My aim in this essay is to provide a summary of this work with a view toward motivating new philosophical research in this important area. "Maternity and migration" is, I hope to show, a topic worthy of sustained philosophical attention, and many conceptual resources are, in fact, already available for doing this work. However, I shall suggest that this (philosophically) under-explored topic indicates a need for alternative approaches to mainstream immigration ethics.

2. Friday, September 27 3:00pm, BEH 113

"Is It All Because of a Story?"

Todd Jones, Department of Philosophy, University of Nevada Las Vegas

This talk further examines an issue I gave a talk on in Fall 2018. One of the most popular journalistic explanations of political (and other) activity is that certain (often false) narrative stories gives people the beliefs and desires that drive their behavior. In this talk I look at the central problems for such claims.

3. Friday, October 11 3:00pm, BEH 113

"Consent and Third-Party Coercion."

David Boonin, Department of Philosophy, University of Colorado, Boulder

Suppose Al threatens to beat Betty if she doesn't agree to give him the money in her pocket, that Al's threat is credible and sincere, that Betty knows this, and that Betty has no way to get Al to withdraw his threat. It's clear that if Betty says yes in response to Al's threat in this case, the consent she gives to let Al take control of her money isn't valid: the fact that she said yes does not make it permissible for Al to take her money. Now suppose Al threatens to beat Betty if she doesn't agree to give the money in her pocket to Charles, that Al's threat is credible and sincere, that Betty and Charles both know this, and that neither Betty nor Charles have a way to get Al to withdraw his threat. It seems natural to suppose that if Betty says yes in response to Al's threat in this case, the consent she gives to let Charles take control of her money isn't valid either and that, more generally, if consent is invalid in cases of two-party coercion, it is also invalid in cases of third-party coercion. I will argue in this talk, however, that this is a mistake. While consent is invalid in cases of two-party coercion, it is nonetheless valid in cases of third-party coercion. This has important theoretical consequences for our understanding of what makes consent invalid in standard two-party cases and important practical consequences in such areas as sexual ethics and medical ethics, where instances of third-party coercion can and do occur.

4. Friday, October 18, 2019 - 3:00pm in BEH 113

"What We Talk about When We Talk about Mental States."

Zoe Drayson, Department of Philosophy, University of California, Davis

Cognitive scientists in the 1980s were interested in the semantics of psychological state ascriptions: both realists and eliminativists agreed that the truth of such ascriptions depended on facts about cognitive architecture. But the semantics and the science of the mind have since gone their separate ways. Semantic approaches to mental states (e.g. Stanley and Williamson 2001 on know-how) steer clear of empirical claims about cognition, and scientifically inclined theories of the mind (e.g. the predictive processing theories of Clark 2013 and Hohwy 2013) have nothing to say about the truthmakers of psychological predicates. This separation may be ending, however, with the rise of Literalism (Figdor 2018) and Fictionalism (Demeter 2013, Toon 2016), which are both positions attempting to reconcile the semantic and scientific elements of philosophy of mind. In this paper, I explore the reasons behind the previous separation of semantics and science, and the challenges facing these new attempts to bring them back together.

5. Friday, November 8, 2019 - 3:00pm in BEH 113

"Utilitarianism for Animals, Kantianism for People."

Bob Fischer, Department of Philosophy, Texas State University

We owe the slogan, "Utilitarianism for animals, Kantianism for people," to Robert Nozick. This phrase is shorthand for view that we should "(1) maximize the total happiness of all living beings; (2) place stringent side constraints on what one may do to human beings." Call this a "hybrid view." There are many possible hybrid views, both because there are many moral theories that you might pair up (e.g., "ecocentrism for animals, pluralistic consequentialism for people"), and at least as many ways in which you might have the moral theories interact (the people-oriented principle might get lexical priority, or you could have a threshold approach, etc.). These options leave us with two questions. First, what should we make of the most famous hybrid view, "Utilitarianism for animals, Kantianism for people"? I'll suggest that it's most plausible if it captures our intuitions particularly well, but that, in fact, the fit isn't great. Second, if we're ultimately critical of "Utilitarianism for animals, Kantianism for people," might any alternative fare better? I won't try to answer this question directly. Instead, I want to stand back and consider the sort of moral methodology that might give hybrid views a fighting chance.

6. Friday, November 22, 2019 - 3:00pm in BEH 113

"Emersonian Epistemology, Naturalized?"

Jonathan Weinberg, Department of Philosophy, University of Arizona

The transcendentalist philosophy of Ralph Waldo Emerson has almost no resonance at all in the contemporary Anglo-analytic philosophical mainstream. And it is not mysterious why he might be on the outs with philosophy as we tend to practice it today: his metaphysics is exuberantly pantheistic; his writing style much more of the pulpit than the seminar room; his methodology, a matter of often-inchoate insight sparked by aphorism, much more than a conceptual truth laid bare by discursive, logical argumentation. Nonetheless, I cannot shake the feeling that Emerson presents for us a valuable treasure of the American philosophical legacy — one which we are, to our own loss, failing to inherit and make our own. My project here is to attempt an initial reconnaissance of whether contemporary analytic philosophy, especially in its “naturalistic” vein, can find a new home in itself for this old tradition. The challenge, in a nutshell, is this: if we are not to become pantheists ourselves (and surely most of us will not), then what possible form could such an inheritance take?

7. Friday, December 6, 2019 - 3:00pm in BEH 113

"Propositions and Paradox."

James Woodbridge and Jesse Fitts, Department of Philosophy, University of Nevada Las Vegas

We lay out a generalized version of the Russell-Myhill Paradox, which purports to show that the notion of proposition is incoherent because it generates a violation of Cantor's theorem (according to which the power set of any set must have more members than that set). We recast the paradox without appeal to the notion of truth (to bypass responses that appeal to deflationism about truth) or appeal to the contents of mental states (to bypass responses to Kaplan's version of the paradox for possible-world semantics). We leverage the generalized paradox to present a dilemma: traditional and current theories of propositions favored by many appear to fall to the paradox, while theories that escape the dilemma suffer from otherwise persistent problems—the Benacerraf problems, the problem of the unity of the proposition, and an inability to explain representation, among others. We then sketch a branching way forward, one according to which we must either accept a non-representational accounts of propositions, or reject the existence of propositions while accounting for proposition-*talk*.

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