

# UNLV

## PHILOSOPHY COLLOQUIUM SPRING 2019

**1. Friday, February 22, 2019 - 3:00pm, BEH 217**

**"Natural Artificiality: A Contested Pattern in Human Evolution."**

**Phillip Honenberger, Department of Philosophy, University of Las Vegas**

In the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, a number of theorists proposed a particular pattern of relation between biological and cultural factors in human life: namely, that while capacity for culture is a selected-for or species-typical feature of human beings, the content of that culture is not equivalently selected-for or species-typical. This pattern poses interesting questions for evolutionary theory and theories of behavior, and (to the extent it applies) may have implications for epistemology, ethics, and social theory. My aim in this talk is to clarify how such a structure is possible from a contemporary biological standpoint, as well as to discriminate various types of pattern of this sort. In conducting the analysis I draw on recent discussions of species-typical "natures" as well as the effect of environment on phenotypic expression of a common genotype ("norms of reaction"), niche-construction theory, and gene-culture co-evolution.

**2. Friday, March 8, 2019 - 3:00pm, BEH 217**

**"The Propositional Benacerraf Problem."**

**Jesse Fitts, Department of Philosophy, University of Las Vegas**

Writers in the propositions literature consider the Benacerraf objection serious, often decisive. The objection figures heavily in dismissing standard theories of propositions of the past, notably set-theoretic theories. I argue that the situation is more complicated. After explicating the propositional Benacerraf problem, I focus on a classic set-theoretic theory of propositions, the possible worlds theory, and argue that methodological considerations influence the objection's success.

**3. Friday, March 29, 2019 - 3:00pm, BEH 217**

**"The Social Epistemology of Maps."**

**Rebecca Kukla, Department of Philosophy, Georgetown University**

A burgeoning branch of philosophy of science attends to the material and social production of scientific knowledge, and examines how interests are often embedded inextricably in scientific standards and methods. Cartography and geographic information science have not received this kind of analysis. To the extent that philosophers talk about maps, they generally discuss abstract visual representations isolated from their materiality or the context of their production. But maps are physical entities shaped by the technological, social, economic, and political conditions in which they are generated. They are also potent tools of social power. In this presentation I will examine the social epistemology of maps. I argue that there is no such thing as a neutral map; any map is structured by interest-ridden judgments about how to balance epistemic risks. I explore several ways in which values and interests are built into the production of maps and their epistemic functioning.

#### **4. Friday, April 12, 2019 - 3:00pm, BEH 217**

##### **"Outline of an Intensional Theory of Truth."**

**Roy Cook, Department of Philosophy, University of Minnesota**

In this talk I will extend the fixed-point semantics of (Kripke 1975) via the addition of two unary intensional operators: a paradoxicality operator  $\Pi$  where  $\Pi(\varphi)$  is true if and only if  $\varphi$  is paradoxical (i.e., if and only if  $\varphi$  receives the third, non-classical value on all fixed-points), and a semi-truth operator  $\Sigma T$  where  $\Sigma T(\varphi)$  is true if and only if any fixed point can be extended to one on which  $\varphi$  receives the value true. I will sketch proofs of a generalized version of Kripke's fixed-point theorem, guaranteeing the existence of models of this new language, and an expressive completeness result, demonstrating that these new operators allow us to express every allowable (i.e., every monotonic) intensional unary operator. I conclude with an exploration of the significant improvements in expressive power that result from the addition of these new operators, and I precisely identify what still cannot be said on this intensional extension of the Kripkean framework.

#### **5. Friday, April 19, 2019 - 3:00pm, BEH 217**

##### **"On the Generalization Problem for Horwich's Minimal Theories of Truth and 'True'."**

**Klaus Ladstaetter, Department of Philosophy, University of Las Vegas**

According to Horwich's minimal theory of truth, the explanatorily basic facts about the property of truth are expressed by the infinitely many, non-paradoxical, instances of the equivalence schema:

(T) The proposition that  $p$  is true iff  $p$ .

Moreover, Horwich claims that all non-basic facts about truth can be explained based on these T-biconditionals (conjoined with unproblematic assumptions of logic). But, then, how can generalizations about truth be explained on this basis? Horwich's answer is to invoke an additional, non-standard rule of inference--the rule of infinite induction. According to Horwich's minimal theory of the meaning of "true", the predicate's meaning is constituted by its explanatorily basic use or acceptance property, i.e. by our underived disposition to accept all T-biconditionals. Moreover, Horwich claims that all non-basic uses of the truth predicate can be explained based on this disposition (conjoined with dispositions to accept unproblematic assumptions of logic). But, then, how can our disposition to accept generalizations about truth be explained on this basis? Horwich's answer is to invoke an additional explanatory premise--one that does not explicitly concern the truth predicate.

In my talk I discuss the proposed additions to resolve the generalization problem. Has Horwich resolved it?

#### **6. Friday, May 3, 2019 - 3:00pm, BEH 217**

##### **"The Practical Value of Causal Understanding."**

**Michael Strevens, Department of Philosophy, New York University**

We philosophers give explanations for the sheer intellectual satisfaction of it. But many writers have supposed that the urge to explain has in addition a more practical payoff. Learning the nature of this payoff might help us to understand why the criteria for correct causal explanation have the form they do. The first part of this paper considers and rejects one popular thesis about the practical payoff, that the primary function of causal understanding is to help us to answer "What if things had been different" questions. The second part of the paper advocates an alternative, that the primary function of causal understanding is to help us to discern "fine-grained variation" in simple statistical regularities, or if you like, the ability to discern the "ceteris paribus conditions" of simple statistical generalizations.

7. Friday, May 10, 2019 - 3:00pm, BEH 217

"E  $\rightarrow$  N"

Chris, Tillman and Adam Murray, Department of Philosophy, University of Manitoba

This talk is based on work done with Joshua Spencer of UW-Milwaukee. What is the relationship between essence and necessity? A popular thought was that they amount to the same thing, or are, at least, materially equivalent. But Kit Fine (1994) convinced many that this isn't so; there can be necessary facts pertaining to you (e.g., you're a member of your singleton), that aren't correspondingly essence facts (supposing your essence is silent on whether there are sets). In slogan form, we can think of Fine as arguing for N  $\rightarrow$  E.

We want to argue that the relationship between essence and necessity is even more complicated: we argue for E  $\rightarrow$  N. That is, there can be essence facts pertaining to a thing that aren't correspondingly necessary facts. Some x can figure into the essence of y, but without it being the case that, necessarily, y exists only if x does. We consider a range of metaphysical views that we see as committed to E  $\rightarrow$  N. But the bigger point, for us, is that E  $\rightarrow$  N should be endorsed regardless of your stance on those metaphysical views. For an account of essence should not decide seemingly independent and substantive metaphysical debates by fiat.

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# PHILOSOPHY COLLOQUIUM SPRING 2019

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