UPJA Virtual Conference for Undergraduate Philosophy
20th-21st November 2021

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Saturday Keynote Address

[1]   Are conspiracy theories (epistemically) suspicious?
        Assoc. Prof. M R. X. Dentith, Beijing Normal University

Student Presentations

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        Brigitte Assi, The University of Melbourne

[3]   Rearticulating the Situationist Threat to Moral Responsibility
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[4]   An agapic approach to parental licensing
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Sunday Keynote Address

[6]   Ethics must be seen to be done: Signalling and Moral Ambiguity
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Student Presentations

[7]   The Method of Wide Reflective Equilibrium and Self-evidence
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Presenter Abstracts and Bios

[1]   Assoc. Prof. M R. X. Dentith, Beijing Normal University
        "Are conspiracy theories (epistemically) suspicious?"

Saturday November 20th, 4:30 PM - 5:30 PM AEDT (UTC+11)

Conspiracy theories and conspiracy theorists have been accused of a great many sins, but are conspiracy theories really epistemically problematic? Well, according to some recent work (such as that by Cassam Quassim, Keith Harris, and M. Guilia Napolitano), yes they are. Yet a number of other philosophers (myself included) like Brian L. Keeley, Charles Pigden, Kurtis Hagen, Lee Basham, and the like have argued "No!"

I will argue that there are features of certain conspiracy theories which license a limited suspicion of such theories. I will also argue that whilst these features license some suspicion of conspiracy theories, we need to be careful about generalising from a suspicion of particular conspiracy theories to a suspicion of conspiracy theories more generally. To understand why, we need to get to the bottom of what exactly makes us suspicious of certain conspiracy theories, and how being suspicious of a conspiracy theory does not always tell us anything about how likely the theory in question is to be false...

BIO: M R. X. Dentith is an Associate Professor in Philosophy at the Center for International Philosophy at Beijing Normal University at Zhuhai. Their chief research interests surround the epistemic analysis of conspiracy theories, as well as rumours, fake news, and the epistemology of secrecy. In 2014 they wrote the first single author on conspiracy theory in Philosophy, The Philosophy of Conspiracy Theories (Palgrave, 2014). This has led to a rather fruitful series of publications on the topic, including "Debunking conspiracy theories" published in 2020. They co-host The Podcaster's Guide to the Conspiracy with Josh Addison in their spare time.

[2]   Brigitte Assi
        "Merleau-Ponty's Lived Spaced: On the Phenomenology of Orientation"

Saturday November 20th, 5:30 PM - 6:00 PM AEDT (UTC+11)

Merleau-Ponty's conception of lived-space is fundamental to his phenomenology. However, Merleau-Ponty's lived space has had little engagement in philosophical discussions surrounding his phenomenology. This presentation engages in a close dialogue with Merleau-Ponty's

conception of space and its relation to the body. Specifically, I analyse and critique his claim that "there would be for me no such thing as space if I did not have a body". I analyse the implications of this claim, specifically in relation to orientation. I argue that given Merleau-Ponty's conception of the body as a fundamentally oriented being, his internal reasoning for concluding that the body and space co-constitute each other is internally inconsistent.

BIO: Brigitte is a recently graduated philosophy Honours student at the University of Melbourne, Australia. Finding philosophy late in her degree, Brigitte has a passion in a broad range of topics. These include philosophy of mind, cognitive philosophy, philosophy of perception (with a particular interest in the works of Merleau-Ponty), feminist phenomenology, and aesthetics. Brigitte recently completed her thesis where she wrote on the effects of pornographic material on the intuitive mind, giving insight as to how recent work in philosophy of mind can be used as a feminist tool. In continuing her passion, Brigitte is hoping to work toward obtaining a Master's in philosophy, focusing on feminist critiques of philosophical mental models of action and perception. When not studying, Brigitte is often found in her small North Melbourne garden tending to her tomato plants.

[3]   Will Cailes
       "Rearticulating the Situationist Threat to Moral Responsibility"

Saturday November 20th, 6:30 PM - 7:00 PM AEDT (UTC+11)

Situationism claims that certain external aspects of situations can influence agents' behaviour in significant and often negative ways that are not explicable by their character traits. The reasons-responsive theory of moral responsibility states that an agent is morally responsible for their actions if they can (1) form justifiable reasons; and (2) act upon those reasons. If situationism is true then it appears to pose a substantial threat to reasons-responsiveness, in particular the paradigmatic formulation of moderate reasons-responsiveness, by undermining agents' ability to form appropriate reasons.

This paper seeks to undermine the situationist threat to moderate reasons-responsiveness by demonstrating that the threat erroneously treats the situationist literature as homogeneously interacting with reason-formation. To highlight this error, this paper will revisit the situationist literature and demonstrate that situationist experiments impact reason-formation in two distinct ways. This results in three conclusions. First, that many of the participants in situationist experiments form appropriate reasons and thus are morally responsible. Second, that most participants

who form justifiable reasons do not meaningfully threaten our concepts of morality. Third, that the remaining minority of participants who fit neither of these descriptions do support the situationist threat as they are not morally responsible and commit moral wrongs. Consequently, the traditional articulation of the situationist threat overstates its implications for moral responsibility.

BIO: Will has recently completed his philosophy Honours studies at Monash University while working as a philosophy and PPE tutor. His research interests primarily focus on philosophy of action, ethics, and their intersection and he wishes to pursue these areas further in future. He is presently in the process of completing further studies in non-philosophical areas while applying for post-graduate philosophy programs and when not engaging in philosophy likes to get convincingly beaten at chess online.

[4]   Zacharie Chiron
       "An agapic approach to parental licensing"

Saturday November 20th, 7:00 PM - 7:30 PM AEDT (UTC+11)

In the face of substantial parental abuse and neglect (one in seven children in the United States), this paper explores an approach to parental licensing in accordance with agapic love. Given the controversial nature of the idea of introducing a parental license, the first section draws initial reflections about intrinsic and instrumental values and what implications these have for ethical decisions. The second section analyses agape ethics through the opposition of different forms of agape ethics, namely: welfarist and non-welfarist, consequentialist and non-consequentialist, impartial and partial. This is a necessary step to be able to apply agape to the specific issue of parental licensing. The two last sections apply agape to parental licensing in theory and in practice, through a discussion of the general aims of parental licensing and of practical difficulties to do with its implementation as a public policy. The conclusion offers a nuanced account of the appropriateness of soft and hard forms of parental licensing as well as a few alternatives, from the perspective of both welfarist and non-welfarist agape ethics.

BIO: Zacharie is a philosophy Master's student at KU Leuven, Belgium, having just graduated from a Bachelor's in Philosophy and Politics at Lancaster, UK. They have a passion for ethics, particularly agapism – an ethics based on unconditional and universal love. As per this passion, Zacharie has written their Bachelor's dissertation on 'What is ethically distinctive and beneficial about a focus on agape?' and is currently writing their Master's thesis on 'Analysing agape and responsibility in Levinas, Ricoeur and Greenway'. They are also founder and president of the

charitable association The Agapic Project, which applies agape through specific projects tackling a wide range of issues, including parenting, homelessness, education for children with disabilities, and animal welfare.

Zacharie hopes to follow their current Master's with an abridged research Master's and then a PhD on motivations for following agape, and practical implications of agape. When not studying, they like to discuss ethics with friends, and work on their as yet unpublished Fantasy/Sci-Fi novel series.

[5]   Sami Tayub
         "Bundle Theory is Committed to Tropes"

Saturday November 20th, 7:30 PM - 8:00 PM AEDT (UTC+11)

> Bundle theory posits that objects are merely collections of properties. However, the nature of these properties are contentious: are they tropes or universals? I argue they are tropes, because bundles of universals cannot account for the numerical distinctness of two qualitatively similar objects - like Black's spheres. Bundles of universals' rebuttal attempts rely on attaching spatial attributes to the spheres: either by appealing to the very nature of universals or specific spatiotemporal properties. I show both to fail: the former is counter-intuitively absurd, as I illustrate with a cloning counterexample, and the latter impotent in differentiating the spheres. Bundle of tropes is untroubled by numerical distinctness in Black's Spheres, because of the distinctness of tropes. However, it does face the issue of accounting for their qualitative similarity. I believe this not to be an issue for two reasons: making all properties, and hence objects, distinct is a more accurate metaphysical worldview and resemblance classes can account for the approximate similarity of objects. I illustrate the former by adducing the empirically undetectable differences between qualitatively similar shapes and the latter by showing it immune to Russell's regress. Hence, bundle theory is committed to tropes.

BIO: Sami is currently reading an MA in Philosophy at King's College London, UK. He has just graduated from Durham University, UK with a degree in Natural Sciences, specialising in Philosophy and Physics. He hopes to continue pursuing Philosophy, where he intends to specialise in applying contemporary Physics to traditional metaphysical issues. Away from Philosophy, Sami enjoys cricket and formula one.

[6]   Dr. Claire Benn, Australian National University

"Ethics must be seen to be done: Signalling and Moral Ambiguity"

Sunday November 21st, 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM AEDT (UTC+11)

Ethicists have already begun to grapple with the question of how our own ignorance and uncertainty affects what we ought to do. In this talk, I demonstrate that an agent must also be responsive to the uncertainty and mistaken beliefs of *others*. Drawing on Signalling Theory from economics and biology and extending it to the moral domain, I show that an information asymmetry can exist between an agent and an observer resulting in the agent's actions being 'morally ambiguous': even the actions of a conscientious moral agent can look impermissible from an observer's point of view. I provide a systematic exploration of some of the ethical dimensions of such information asymmetries: how moral ambiguity is morally consequential and thus, in turn, how normative signalling is a matter of moral responsibility. Highlighting the informational value of ethical action, I demonstrate that, like justice, ethics must be seen to be done.

BIO: Claire Benn is a researcher at the Australian National University. Her PhD focused on going above the call of duty. In recent years her work has addressed how our socio-technical reality demands a revision to our moral understanding, as it shapes our abilities, opportunities and the effects of our actions. The questions and problems technological systems, in particular data and AI, raise demand a re-examination of our ethical concepts, assumptions and practices. As she shows through her work, reflecting on technological change is a pivotal lens through which to make real progress in central topics of moral theory, such as obligations, decision-making under uncertainty, moral conflicts and dilemmas, communication, empathy, and artistic expression.

[7]   Tiago Carneiro da Silva
       "The Method of Wide Reflective Equilibrium and Self-evidence"

Sunday November 21st, 11:00 AM - 11:30 AM AEDT (UTC+11)

In this presentation, my ultimate aim is to show that the method of wide reflective equilibrium (MWRE) can be improved by adding two further steps in light of an appeal to self-evidence. In order to do this, I first provide some prima facie positive reasons to accept the existence of this kind of proposition and argue that appealing to self-evidence does not have to be considered a dogmatic approach in the search for moral justification, as opponents to this view generally hold. I do this while describing characteristics of self-evidence that are worth considering in devising a moral methodology. This allows us to see how the search for self-evident propositions may be compatible with the

MWRE and that the method is not as radically opposed to the appeal to self-evidence as it is commonly assumed. More specifically, I argue that the MWRE is more effective in leading us to find self-evident beliefs than one might initially expect. Finally, based on some features self-evident beliefs have, I propose that, in addition to following the steps that the MWRE requires us to follow, we should meet two further requirements in order to detect self-evident beliefs in a more effective way. The resulting methodological proposal, I argue, can be desirable even for those who deny the existence of self-evident propositions.

BIO: Tiago is an undergraduate student about to finish his degree in philosophy at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ). He is mainly interested in debates in metaethics, normative ethics, epistemology and philosophy of science. He was an undergraduate researcher for two years (2018-2020), primarily focusing on the method of reflective equilibrium, foundationalism and coherentism in ethics. Currently, he is applying for the Oxford's BPhil in Philosophy and the PPGLM's master's programme at UFRJ to further his studies on moral epistemology and methodology.

[8]   Yunlong Cao
       "Beyond Soul and Virtue: Benefit in Stoic Ethics"

Sunday November 21st, 12:00 PM - 12:30 PM AEDT (UTC+11)

Readers of Stoicism may find 'benefit' (*ōpheleia*) an essential but enigmatic concept. It directly connects to some critical terms of Stoic ethics, such as 'good' and 'virtue,' but there is no extant discussion of a definition. What makes benefit beneficial? Beyond the superficial connections, why is benefit a good thing? I argue that these essential questions remain unanswerable for a good reason: in his *Anthology*, Stobaeus committed to a specious claim about benefit, which misguided later commentaries. Either the Stoics themselves cursorily took a stronger contrast between sages and inferior people at the cost of coherence, or Stobaeus simply mischaracterized the Stoics' ideas in his descriptions. This paper aims to clarify Stobaeus's inaccurate description and reconstruct a coherent and comprehensible interpretation of benefit with nature's agreement.

BIO: Yunlong Cao is a fourth-year BA/MA student at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, USA. He majors in philosophy and cognitive science and minors in mathematics. His main philosophical interests are epistemology, metaphysics, and the history of philosophy. He is currently working on a directed study project on skepticism and personal identity. After graduation, Yunlong hopes to pursue further studies in philosophy.

[9]   Martin Walter Niederl
        "Practical Animal Reasoning"

Sunday November 21st, 12:30 PM - 1:00 PM AEDT (UTC+11)

Taking up plausible commitments, Glock (2019) presents a series of arguments to the extent that non-linguistic animals are capable of acting rationally and for reasons. I will argue that roughly the same commitments suffice for establishing two more claims: (1) that animals can conceptualize reasons as reasons, (2) that animals can act rationally in a further sense. Moreover, I believe that this also provides initial grounds for yet another idea: (3) that animals can *reason practically*. My argument thus proceeds in two steps. First, I will lay out the claims a proponent of this idea would be committed to. However, it will not be my primary concern to argue for the plausibility of these commitments themselves. Rather, second, I will focus on showing that my three claims follow directly from them. Hence, I show that accepting certain plausible commitments allows us to explain the cognitive complexity that we intuitively perceive in non-human animals by using the very same models we use for human agents.

BIO: Martin is currently pursuing his Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy, as well as his Bachelor of Education in Psychology, Philosophy, and English at the University of Vienna. His interests tend to focus on all things normative which continues to lead him into different areas of philosophy. Thus, it was thinking about reasons and the role they play in our explanation and justification of action that led Martin to exploring what kind of roles they might even be able to play in cognitive systems other than their own – like those of non-human animals. Other than this, he enjoys reading, thinking, and writing about reasons more generally, moral responsibility, collective agency, and all their various intersections.

[10]   Will Cailes, Thomas Spiteri, Jack Hawke (何健平) and Jessica Sophia Ralph
        Q&A with UPJA Editorial Team

Sunday November 21st, 1:00 PM - 1:30 PM AEDT (UTC+11)