UPJA The Undergraduate Philosophy Journal of Australasia

UPJA Hybrid Conference for Undergraduate Philosophy

Friday, 21st of November 2025

10 AM – 2:30 PM AEDT (UTC+11), A14 Quadrangle Seminar Room N494

Keynote Address

10:15 - 11:15 AM. Limerence and the Relationship Escalator
Assoc. Prof. Samuel Shpall, The University of Sydney

Limerence is a distinctive human experience, sometimes called "being in love." I sketch an account of this experience derived from the psychological work of Dorothy Tennov (1979). I then use the account of limerence to motivate a new way of understanding the concept of the *relationship escalator*, a concept that figures prominently in recent writing on ethical non-monogamy. My goal is to crystallize a network of problematic assumptions about the relationships between limerence, romantic love, monogamy, and parenting.

Student Presentations

11:15 - 11:45 AM. Diotima and Dante: A Ladder of Love Towards God
Alex Anderson, The University of Sydney

Dante's portrayal of Beatrice has long confounded readers, but in mapping a Platonic 'ladder of love' in Dante's writing we invite a new perspective on the problematic of her character. This essay attempts to do this by a comparison of Diotima's account of love in Plato's *Symposium* with Dante's musings on Beatrice in *La Vita Nuova* and the *Divine Comedy*. These accounts are bridged by the influence of Aquinas' *Fourth Way for Proving the Existence of God* on Dante – a work which is inherently Platonic in nature. In drawing this comparison, we find that, in Plato, love is more like a means to the end of contemplating the abstract ideal of beauty, but in Dante, love is instead the resonance of God's own love, a divine power which not only enables ascension

but is evidence of ascension's telos – the attraction that all beings have towards their creator. This discussion of Plato and Dante produces new ideas about the character of Beatrice and the extent to which she is cast in either a passive or active light, whether she is object or a subject. In fact, the answer is the latter in both cases as our perspective shifts from a focus on Dante's love for Beatrice to instead Beatrice's love for Dante.

11:45 - 12:15 PM. The Epistemic Innocence of Common Sense Misbeliefs
April (Xinyi) Yang, The University of Sydney

This paper discusses the tension between epistemic responsibility and the indispensability of certain common sense misbeliefs, particularly focusing on the belief in the general reliability of memory. Empirical research shows that memory is prone to systematic distortion, yet trusting our memory is essential for reasoning, decision-making, and inquiry. Snow's (2018) account on epistemic responsibility classifies all misbeliefs as epistemically irresponsible, even when they bring pragmatic or epistemic benefits. I argue that this approach is too rigid for indispensable misbeliefs. Drawing on Bortolotti's (2015) notion of epistemic innocence, I propose a restricted application: beliefs that are necessary for any agent to engage in epistemic activity could qualify as epistemically innocent. This framework acknowledges the indispensability of some common sense misbeliefs without resorting to a problematic form of epistemic consequentialism. The belief in memory's reliability meets both criteria for epistemic innocence: it is essential for participation in epistemic activities, and there is no viable alternative belief could serve the same role. I conclude that some common sense misbeliefs lie outside the scope of epistemic responsibility without being epistemically justified.

Tea and Coffee Break
12:15 - 12:30 PM

12:30 - 1:00 PM. A Critical Reply to Williamson's 'Fragility, Influence, and Intrinsicality'
Zakhar Zolotarev, Monash University

In response to David Lewis' original counterfactual account of causation's inability to deal with late preemption cases, Patrick Williamson suggests that we could adopt extreme standards of fragility. I outline the implications of this solution and defend Lewis' view that spurious causes pose a greater challenge to extreme fragility than

they do to the original counterfactual account. I then argue that adopting extreme standards of fragility ultimately fails to adequately address late preemption. Williamson advocates that in order to allow for the intrinsicality of causal processes, we should adopt the original counterfactual account as quasi-dependence. He indicates that proponents of quasi-dependence must make some metaphysical concessions, namely that all trumping cases involve cutting and that absences not only do not exist, but that propositions describing absences are really describing contrastive positive claims. I address each concession in turn and draw out their implications, showing that not only do they not provide a satisfying solution to the problems they aim to solve, but that they likely generate further problems.

1:00 - 1:30 PM. The Buddha and the Cartesian Self: Why the Buddha's Argument Is a Philosophical Failure
Ruiwen Guo, Australian National University

The kind of self that Descartes intuits in his Meditations is one that exists independently of experience, yet possesses and actively participates in it. The Buddha's argument against the "Cartesian Self"—which should be distinguished from his argument against the identification of the self with the totality or any component of the five aggregates—is that the Cartesian Self is both cognitively meaningless and morally harmful. However, as I will argue in this essay, the Buddha's argument against the Cartesian Self is grounded in his epistemology and soteriology, both of which his opponents may reject for good reasons. The Buddha's argument against the Cartesian Self is therefore a philosophical failure in the sense that it cannot convince those who believe in the Cartesian Self to abandon this belief.

1:30 - 2:00 PM. Nussbaum's Objectification: A Defence Mechanism Against the Influence of Others and Our Own Moral Disengagement
Stuart McKay, Australian Catholic University

This presentation applies Martha Nussbaum's framework of objectification to real-world events and figures, moving beyond her typical focus on psychosexual themes and fictional literature. Nussbaum offers a checklist to help us identify and guard against both intentional and unintentional objectification of people and events. Failure to recognise objectification, or worse, by consciously embracing it, will misguide and fool us at best, but at worst, it will take us to places of moral disengagement and ultimately towards atrocity. By testing Nussbaum's framework against contemporary examples – specifically the atomic bombings of World War Two and the alleged war crimes by Australian soldiers in Afghanistan, this presentation reveals how objectification is often employed for motives that may go unrecognised unless we remain alert to how others manipulate narratives, or how we ourselves may be

complicit in objectifying people and events. The central aim is to sharpen our alertness to these influences, encourage ethical reflection and prevent us heading towards atrocity.

2:00 - 2:30 PM. Plato’s Republic and America’s Oligarchic Soul: Wealth, War, and the Myth of Merit

Ira Patole, The University of Sydney

Plato’s Republic has gained a new relevance in recent years, with a multitude of philosophers using it to try to make sense of our new and unstable political landscape. In Books 8 and 9, Plato traces the degeneration of political regimes from one to the other, including, but not limited to, oligarchy, democracy, and tyranny. Philosophers have written extensively about the similarities between Trump and Plato's tyrant, but several have fixated on the demagoguery elements of his rise and rule. I argue in this essay that the American political landscape today does not display the features of any one of these regimes, but of all of them. Focusing on oligarchy, this paper traces the origins of private property and hierarchical labour relations through timocracy’s decline. It also discusses the timocratic shift from valuing wartime cunning to admiring financial shrewdness in peacetime and links those developments to war profiteering in World War II and the rise of the military-industrial complex in post-WWII America. In a multi-stage degeneration, virtue is slowly replaced by wealth as the object of ultimate societal value, leading to the retrospective legitimisation of the wealthy we observe today as meritorious, even when risen out of privilege.