

BUFFALO ANNUAL EXPERIMENTAL PHILOSOPHY CONFERENCE 2013
University at Buffalo – North Campus

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 11TH

9:00-10:00am A Scientific Case for Conceptual Dualism: The Problem of Consciousness and the Opposing Domains Hypothesis

Anthony Jack, *Case Western Reserve University*

Description: Emerging research in neuroscience and psychology suggests a dualism in human understanding. Our capacity for understanding physical processes appears to be in fundamental tension with our capacity for thinking about the inner mental states of others. In this talk, I first review evidence for a divide in our neural structure which maps onto thinking about minds versus thinking about the mechanical properties of bodies. This divide is intriguing; however it falls short of actually explaining why we perceive difficulties for integrating these two types of understanding. I then introduce a bold hypothesis – that our neural structure constrains our thinking in a way that limits our ability to integrate these two types of understanding. This hypothesis was generated to explain one perceived problem, the apparent existence of an explanatory gap, and makes novel and falsifiable predictions. I then review behavioral and neuroscientific evidence which confirms these predictions and extends the model to address other related issues, including motivational factors associated with belief in ontological dualism.

10:00-10:05am Petite coffee break

10:05-11:05am On the Very Concept of Free Will

Josh May, *University of Alabama at Birmingham*

Description: Determinism seems to rule out a robust sense of options but also prevent our choices from being a matter of luck. In this way, free will seems to require both the truth and falsity of determinism. If the concept of free will is coherent, something must have gone wrong. I offer a diagnosis on which this puzzle is due at least in part to a tension already present in the very idea of free will. In particular, there is not one key aspect of the concept, but at least two. One of these is captured by a certain kind of control (“ensurance”), while the other involves having options (“liberty”). I provide various lines of support for this hypothesis, including some experimental data gathered by probing the judgments of non-specialists. Contrary to a recent wave of empirical results, I argue that both of these factors are part of the concept of free will, not a mere performance error. This helps to resolve the puzzle regarding determinism, but without casting it as a mere verbal dispute.

11:05-11:20am Extended coffee break

11:20am-12:20pm How People Think About Distributing Aid

Nicole Hassoun, *Binghamton University*

Description: This paper examines how people think about aiding others in a way that can inform both theory and practice. It uses data gathered from Kiva, an online, non-profit organization that allows individuals to aid other individuals around the world, to isolate intuitions that people find broadly compelling. The central result of the paper is that people seem to give more priority to aiding those in greater need at least below some threshold. That is, the data strongly suggest incorporating both a threshold and a prioritarian principle into the analysis of what principles for aid distribution people accept. This conclusion should be of broad interest to aid practitioners and policy makers. It may also provide important information for philosophers interested in building, justifying, and criticizing philosophical theories about meeting needs using empirical evidence. Finally, this study's rigorous methodological approach should encourage reflection amongst those doing experimental philosophy about which kinds of evidence are best for establishing different hypotheses.

12:20-1:35pm Lunch

1:35-2:35pm The Status of Epistemic Closure in Ordinary Practice
John Turri, *University of Waterloo*

Description: In its simplest form, the epistemic closure principle says that knowledge is closed under obvious known entailment. Its proponents claim that the principle is a conceptual truth about knowledge and that ordinary thought and talk are implicitly committed to it. They also claim that any view that denies epistemic closure is revisionary and incurs serious costs. I present evidence from two studies that ordinary practice actually betrays an implicit rejection of epistemic closure. This occurs most readily in cases involving inference to a negative conclusion.

2:35-2:40pm Petite coffee break

2:40-3:40pm Saliency and Epistemic Egocentrism
Joshua Alexander, *Siena College*
Chad Gonnerman, *Michigan State University*
John Waterman, *Johns Hopkins University*

Description: Jennifer Nagel has recently proposed a fascinating account of the decreased tendency to attribute knowledge in conversational contexts in which unrealized possibilities of error have been mentioned. Her account appeals to epistemic egocentrism, or what is sometimes called the "curse of knowledge", an egocentric bias to attribute our own mental states to other people. Our aim is to investigate the empirical merits of Nagel's hypothesis about the psychology involved in knowledge attribution. We will present four studies showing that our willingness to attribute knowledge is sensitive to what possibilities have been made salient in a given conversational context, that this sensitivity can be explained in terms of epistemic egocentrism, and that increased motivation doesn't seem to drive down our tendency to mistakenly project our own mental states onto others. We will also preview several additional studies involving individual differences, social distance, and a specific kind of interventional debiasing strategy.

3:40-3:55pm Extended coffee break

3:55-4:55 Individual and Cross-Cultural Differences in Semantic Intuitions: New Experimental Findings
James Beebe, *University at Buffalo*

Description: In 2004 Edouard Machery, Ron Mallon, Shaun Nichols, and Stephen Stich published what has become one of the most widely discussed papers in experimental philosophy, in which they reported that East Asian and Western participants had different intuitions about the semantic reference of proper names. A flurry of criticisms of their work has emerged, and although various replications have been performed, many critics remain unconvinced. We review the current debate over Machery et al.'s (2004) results and take note of which objections to their work have been satisfactorily answered and which ones still need to be addressed. We then report the results of studies that reveal significant cross-cultural and intra-cultural differences in semantic intuitions when we control for variables that critics allege have had a potentially distorting effect on Machery et al.'s findings. These variables include the epistemic perspective from which participants are supposed to understand the research materials, unintended anchoring effects of those materials, and pragmatic factors involved in the interpretation of speech acts within them. Our results confirm the robustness of the cross-cultural differences observed by Machery et al. and thereby strengthen the philosophical challenge they pose.

4:55-5:00pm Petite coffee break

5:00-6:30pm Keynote Address: "Two Conceptions of Subjective Experience"
Edouard Machery, *University of Pittsburgh*

7:15pm Dinner

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 12TH

9:30-10:30am

Philosophical Expertise and Scientific Expertise
Jennifer Nado, *Lingnan University*

Description : This paper discusses the popular 'expertise defense' against experimental arguments against intuition. A popular motivation for this argument involves an analogy with science; since we by default ascribe expertise to e.g. professional physicists, philosophers should be assumed to have similar expertise. I argue that the analogy between philosophy and science in fact supports the experimentalist contention that the use of intuition in philosophy should be minimized.

10:30-10:35am Petite coffee break

10:35-11:35am Folk Mereology is Teleological
David Rose, *Rutgers University*

Description: When do the folk think that mereological composition occurs? Many metaphysicians have wanted a view of composition that fits with folk intuitions, and yet there has been little agreement about what the folk intuit. We aim to put the tools of experimental philosophy to constructive use. Our studies suggest that folk mereology is teleological: people tend to intuit that composition occurs when the result serves a purpose. We thus conclude that metaphysicians should dismiss folk intuitions, as tied into a benighted teleological view of nature.

11:35-11:50am Extended coffee break

11:50am-12:50pm Knowledge and Luck
Peter Blouw, Wesley Buckwalter, and John Turri, *University of Waterloo*

Description: Nearly all success is due to some mix of ability and luck. But some successes we attribute to the agent's ability, whereas others we attribute to luck. To better understand the criteria distinguishing credit from luck, we conducted a case study on knowledge attributions. Knowledge is an achievement that involves reaching the truth. But many factors affecting the truth are beyond our control and reaching the truth is often partly due to luck. Which sorts of luck are compatible with knowledge? We find that knowledge attributions are highly sensitive to lucky events that change the explanation for why a belief is true. By contrast, knowledge attributions are surprisingly insensitive to lucky events that threaten but ultimately fail to change the explanation for why a belief is true. These results shed light on our concept of knowledge and constitute significant progress toward a general understanding of the relation between success and luck.

12:50-2:30pm Lunch

2:30-3:30pm General terms, hybrid theories and ambiguity. A discussion of some experimental results
Genoveva Martí, ICREA and *Universitat de Barcelona*

Description: I examine two sets of experimental results about the semantics of general terms, by Genone and Lombrozo (2012) and by Nichols, Pinillos and Mallon (forthcoming). The results of the two studies allegedly reveal significant variations in semantic intuitions among participants as regards the correct application of general terms. However, the two sets of authors propose two entirely different semantic treatments of general terms in order to explain the significance and the impact of those results. Genone and Lombrozo espouse a hybrid semantics whereas Nichols, Pinillos and Mallon offer an explanation that appeals to ambiguity. I will start by comparing the tests performed by each of these sets of authors and I will analyze the advantages and shortcomings of each of the approaches.

3:30-3:35pm

Petite coffee break

3:35-4:35pm Gender, Minds, and Morals: Gender-Asymmetric Ascriptions of Agency, Sentience, and Moral Status

Garrett Marks-Wilt, *University of Michigan*

Description: Across two experiments, this paper explores a framework for modeling the perceived relationship between gender, minds and morals according to which gender-asymmetric ascriptions of sentience (the capacity to feel pain or suffer) and agency (the capacity to act and cause or intend and do) are closely related to *The Division of Moral Labor*, i.e., the perception that masculine (relative feminine) individuals possess comparatively greater levels of moral agency (associated with responsibility for action), while feminine (relative masculine) individuals tend to be perceived as possessing comparatively greater levels of moral patiency (associated with considerability for concern). Experiment 1 provides cognitive evidence of a comparatively greater association between masculinity (relative femininity) and moral agency, along with a comparatively greater association between femininity (relative masculinity) and moral patiency; Experiment 2 demonstrates that masculine individuals are thought more likely to intend and cause moral wrongdoing and elicit more emotions related to moral responsibility (contempt, anger, and disgust), whereas feminine individuals are thought to be more likely to experience harm and pain when they are the subject of some experience or the recipient of an immoral action and elicit more emotions related to moral concern (sympathy, pity, and compassion).

4:35-4:50pm Extended coffee break

4:50-5:50pm Reversing the Side-Effect Effect

Brian Robinson, *Grand Valley State University*

Description: In the last decade, experimental philosophers have documented systematic asymmetries in the attributions of mental attitudes to agents who produce different types of side effects. We argue that that this effect is driven not simply by norm-violation but by salient norm-violation. As evidence for this hypothesis, we present two new studies in which two conflicting norms are present, and one or both of them is raised to salience. Expanding one's view to these additional cases presents, we argue, a fuller conception of the side-effect effect, which can be reversed by reversing which norm is salient.