

REASON AND AGENCY

The 16th Annual University of Toronto Graduate Conference in Philosophy
May 5 & 6, 2016

SCHEDULE

Thursday, May 5, 2016

Jackman Humanities Building, (170 St. George St.), Room 100A

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| 9:30 – 10:00 | Coffee and Snacks |
| 10:00 – 11:00 | ‘Towards an Ecological Libertarianism’
William Hornett (Sheffield)
Commentary: Aaron Henry & Parisa Moosavi (Toronto) |
| 11:15 – 12:15 | ‘Some Puzzles about Reasons’
Zachary Blaesi (Texas, Austin)
Commentary: Jonathan Payton (Toronto) |
| 12:15 – 1:45 | Lunch Break |
| 1:45 – 2:45 | ‘What ‘No’ Really Means’
Eleanor Gordon-Smith (Sydney)
Commentary: Lisa McKeown (New School) |
| 3:00 – 5:00 | <i>Keynote Address</i>
‘Bradley’s Regress and a Problem in Action Theory’
Helen Steward (Leeds)
Commentary: Manish Oza (Toronto) |
| 5:00 – 7:00 | Reception (all conference attendees invited)
Location: Jackman Humanities Building, Room 418 |

Friday, May 6, 2016

Centre for Ethics, Larkin Building (15 Devonshire Place), Room 200

- 9:30 – 10:00 Coffee and Snacks
- 10:00 – 11:00 ‘Deontological Evidentialism and the Principle that Ought Implies Can’
Luis Oliveira (UMass, Amherst)
Commentary: Emma McClure (Toronto)
- 11:15 – 12:15 ‘Because I Said So’
Juan Piñeros Sanchez (Yale)
Commentary: John Bunke (Toronto)
- 12:15 – 1:45 Lunch Break
- 1:45 – 2:45 ‘Reason, Reasoning, and Weakness of Will’
Jeremiah Carey (Berkeley)
Commentary: Mason Westfall & Rory Harder (Toronto)
- 3:00 – 5:00 *Keynote Address*
‘Retrospection’
Kieran Setiya (MIT)
Commentary: Benjamin Wald (Toronto)
- 6:00– 8:00 Conference Dinner (for invited guests)
Location: The Host (14 Prince Arthur Ave.)

Abstracts

‘Toward an Ecological Libertarianism – A Defence of Agency Incompatibilism’, William Hornett

In this paper I will defend Helen Steward’s agency incompatibilism by utilising ecological notions in J.J. Gibson’s work on perception and action. Steward uses sub-intentional actions as counterexamples to a Davidsonian picture of action and presents a competing picture which identifies actions as bodily movements controlled by the agent – this forms the basis for her libertarianism as agential control requires a genuinely open future. Her response to Mele’s luck objection to libertarianism is that an act of control is predicated on facts about agent’s gearing toward the action being integrated into the agent’s history prior to the action. She allows prior facts to constrain actions and retains her libertarianism by arguing that the agent’s freedom lies in their capacity to refrain from an action-type or contour their execution of an action differently than they in fact did. However, when she later on denies that all actions are done for reasons, she thereby denies that these non-rational actions have explanations at all. This undermines her response to the luck objection with regards sub-intentional actions, because their lacking prior reasons is now a reason to say they are not free. This undermines her original argument. I propose that she need not make that concession and can instead use Gibson’s ecological approach to define sub-intentional actions as affordance-responsive behaviour which shares a structural similarity to the way rational actions are reasons-responsive. I then suggest the outline, based on the

paper's previous discussions, of what I call an ecological conception of freedom: to exercise free will is for an animal to intentionally execute controlled responses to environmental changes perceived in virtue of the animal's tacit understanding of its own bodily structure, capacities, and cognitive architecture.

'Some Puzzles About Reasons', Zachary Blasie

Many philosophers working in metaethics take for granted that the predicates "is a reason for" and "counts in favor of" express or require a common relation, the favoring-relation, which holds of considerations and actions. However, this view encounters a puzzle. For example, suppose Jones owes Smith some money and thus has a reason to pay Smith. In paying Smith, Jones does what he has reason to do, and what he does is an action, a concrete particular. But as H. A. Prichard first noted, this concrete particular does not exist until Jones acts. So, it must be a mistake to think that actions are related in the favoring-relations that hold before agents act. Furthermore, as Roderick Chisholm pointed out, though Jones does what he has reason to do by paying Smith, he could have performed any other number of specific actions while still doing exactly what he has reason to do. This also demands an explanation. I call the Prichard-Chisholm puzzle the combined task of explaining what is favored in a favoring-relation and how it relates to particular actions. In my paper, I develop this puzzle in detail and propose a solution.

'What 'No' really means', Eleanor Gordon-Smith

One way we can exercise our agency is by using words to set the boundaries of what other people may permissibly do to us. We can say "no". What sort of speech act is a refusal? Rae Langton's anti-pornography argument claims it is an Austinian 'illocution', and therefore that it depends on 'uptake' - recognition from its addressee - for its success. Pornography, goes the argument, may teach that women who say "no" in sexual settings intend to gesture at modesty or to titillate instead of to refuse. This would cause widespread failures of uptake and render some women unable to use the word "no" to perform a refusal; it would rob them of one way to use words to exercise their agency. In this paper I argue that refusal does not require uptake to succeed. At least one important function of a refusal is that it marks a boundary around the refuser and declares all conduct over that line to be boundary-crossing. This function is not directed at any agent. It is simply the conjuring of a fact, and so does not depend on uptake by the addressee for its success. This means it can survive an uptake failure like the one Langton describes. I show that this function is separate from - and in fact, prior to - the secondary function of a refusal, which is to deliver a specific prohibition to a specific person. It is a speaker's agency - not any epistemic facts about her interlocutors - that lets her use words like "no" to wield the normative power of setting her own boundaries. As a final argument in favour of this account of refusal, I show that it mirrors our pre-theoretic intuition that consent does not depend on uptake either.

'Deontological Evidentialism and the Principle that Ought Implies Can', Luis Oliveira

Deontological evidentialism is the claim that S ought to form or maintain S's beliefs in accordance with S's evidence. One promising argument for this view turns on the premise that consideration c is a normative reason for S to form or maintain a belief that p only if c is evidence that p is true. In this paper, I discuss the relation between a recent argument for this key premise—offered separately by Nishi Shah (2006) and Ward E. Jones (2009)—and the principle that ought implies can. I argue that anyone who antecedently accepts or rejects this principle already has a reason to resist either this argument's premises or its role in support of deontological evidentialism.

'Because I Said So', Juan Piñeros Sanchez

Stephen Darwall has argued that second-personal normativity drives a wedge between practical and theoretical rationality: whereas it plays a fundamental role in some areas of the practical domain, it can play at most a subordinate role in the theoretical one. Darwall's main argument for this view relies on a picture of theoretical reasoning as defined by relations between beliefs about determinate matters of fact. Partly by questioning this picture, I hope to show that second-personal normativity plays as fundamental a role in some areas of the theoretical domain as well. My central argument against Darwall is based on an analysis of what I call relationships of 'expectational trust', where a person asks us to believe they will do something that is in their

power. Such relations, I argue, can give rise to reasons that are theoretical and fundamentally second-personal. The result is a picture of theoretical rationality that allows for the kinds of rich second-personal relations that authors like Darwall and Michael Thompson have argued are present in the practical domain.

'Reason, Reasoning, and Weakness of Will', Jeremiah Carey

In Plato's Protagoras, Socrates defends an intellectualist moral psychology –he argues that all action is motivated by evaluative belief. Plato himself seems to reject this view in the Republic, claiming that there are three distinct sources of motivation, reason, spirit, and appetite. Though I don't go into the details of this historic dialectic, I want to defend Plato's side of the general debate. I begin by arguing that weak-willed action could not possibly be an expression of practical reason. Thus, if weak-willed action is possible, we must have a way of acting intentionally (i.e., for reasons) in addition to our faculty of reason. After showing how this argument holds up against approaches from Michael Bratman and Pamela Hieronymi, I say briefly how I think we should respond to this argument – by accepting a new tripartite theory of motivation consisting of reason, desire, and will.

CONFERENCE MAP

