5th PhiGS Colloquium

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University of Kent, Templeman Library SR2

Book of Abstracts
Contents

11.00–11.50 Konstanty Kuzma Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich

The Three Reasons Behind John McDowell's Structural Identity Thesis

Graham and Pedersen have recently introduced a helpful way of elucidating the main tenets of John McDowell's Mind and World. According to them, the concept of "conclusive reasons", whereby reasons for beliefs can be knowledge-enabling, best describes McDowell's attempt to anchor empirical beliefs in judgments that exclude the possibility of error. In my paper, I elaborate on Graham and Pedersen's analysis by integrating it into a systematic reconstruction of McDowell's infamous structural identity thesis (SIT).

SIT states that the contents of judgments and perceptual experiences are structured identically. McDowell's reliance on "conclusive reasons", I claim, is one of three reasons that motivate SIT. The first and perhaps best-known reason has to do with McDowell's criticism of coherentism. According to McDowell, our beliefs and judgments can only be world-directed if they can be verified sensually: only if it is possible to check their truth through our senses can judgments and beliefs be said to even be dealing with the world.

The second reason has to do with McDowell's critique of nonconceptualism. According to Mind and World, contents can only stand in rational relations if they are structured conceptually. That is why the nonconceptualist attempt to both

conceive of perceptions nonconceptually, and have them ground judgments and beliefs, is bound to fail. (Why this is supposed to be so is something McDowell says little about, though my paper gathers the evidence that can be retraced in McDowell's thinking.)

Jointly, these two conditions could be met by any conceptualist conception of perceptions. As long as one allows that perceptions be a mode of verifying beliefs and judgments (rather than simply being their cause) while understanding them conceptually, one can take into consideration McDowell's criticism of both coherentism and nonconceptualism.

However, McDowell further thinks that knowledge must be based on "conclusive reasons". If I know that that car is red, my knowledge thereof must be based on reasons that are incompatible with the car not being red. Hence veridical perceptions would have to constitute "conclusive reasons" in order to found empirical knowledge. Only facts appear to be candidates for being "conclusive reasons" that are both conceptually structured and available through our senses. Therefore, the concept of "conclusive reasons" motivates SIT when taken together with the previous two conditions. (I argue that none of the previous conditions could be dropped either.)

11.50–12.40 Jo Payne University of York

Inequality and Moral Incentives

The problem of positional goods has received comparatively little attention in recent discussions of egalitarianism. Apart from a pioneering paper by Brighouse and Swift (2006) the topic has received less attention in theory than the phenomenon merits in practice. The last forty years have seen a significant increase in income and wealth inequality across the affluent West (Piketty 2014). This thesis argues that positional competition in our capitalist societies plays an important role in explaining these developments. This is particularly so when the process of "marketisation" is applied to key life goods

such as healthcare and education. Competition over positional goods is a zero-sum game where "what the winners win, losers lose" (Hirsch 1976, 52). Each of us individually exerts greater time, effort, and money to maintain our positions in a way that is collectively self-defeating, motivated not by selfishness, but as what Hirsch (ibid., 51) calls a "defensive necessity". Falling behind in positional competition can cause real damage to a person's wellbeing, with citizens forced to compete with each other or faced with losing out on important social goods (Hussain 2020). This results in people feeling as though they

must continually work in order to fulfil any number of artificial needs they are given, with "cumulative advantage" (Merton 1988, 606) making it seemingly impossible to escape the repressive world of competition. Cumulative advantage, as described by sociologist Robert Merton (ibid.), sees initial advantages in status generate further cumulative gains both in status and in other goods keyed into status, such as opportunity.

On the face of it, with no overall advantage to be had by any competitor, positional competition raises the costs for all. It is a collectively self-defeating strategy. If we consider Robert Frank's (2016, 26) analogy between positional competition and the crowd in a stadium, when we all stand, "no one sees better than when all were seated". Yet, when some stand, we all need to stand to maintain our view. Without a collective solution to the problem of positional competition, we spend excessive time, effort, and money, but the returns for this excessive spending "falls to zero" (ibid., 61). Frank also points out that we can also, if we choose, continue to compete – but for greatly reduced stakes that reduce the social waste of positional competition.

The solution to the problem of positionality advanced in this paper is that our egalitarian goal should be strict material equality. This does not, in practice, mean treating everyone the same. Those with significant needs may require disproportionate resources and there is no objection in principle to compensatory incentives for work that is difficult, dangerous, or requires lengthy training (Smith, 1998). However, beyond those exceptions, society's social product should be socialised and put at the service of egalitarian ends. These include extensive provision of public goods to lessen the force of positional pressures. In Joseph Carens's (1981) utopian proposal, it is argued that an equal distribution of wealth and goods would not cause a reduction in the productive efficiency of society or place a limit on our individual freedoms. This supposedly counterintuitive ideal relies on moral incentives replacing material incentives, as the reward for making a greater contribution to society by, for example, achieving a great deal in one's employment is not based on monetary gain, but the esteem of one's fellow citizens. I argue that with moral incentives, positionality can take on a positive role, with citizen's motivations directed towards the common good, acting as stewards for our entire productive surplus.

1.40–2.30 Jacob Leo Blitz
The University of Arizona

Impersistent Roles and Justifying Role Obligations

The roles that role ethics focuses on are most typically "constellations of institutionally specified rights and duties" (Hardimon 1994) that are persistent, broad, coherent, choice involving, and challenging (Baril 2016). Many roles exist, however, that violate the first two of Baril's five criteria but fulfil the other three as well as Hardimon's basic definition. These *impersistent roles* may have minimal impact on our sense of identity, and we may take them up only once, but central role ethics questions clearly apply to such cases. C. Thi Nguyen's theory of game-playing as exploring 'modes of agency' (2020) is a particularly clear recent picture of some of humans' most trivial roles, described in terms that align neatly with role ethics concepts.

What can impersistent roles tell us about the major problem of what to do when role obligations (or

supererogations [Baril 2016] or simply virtues) conflict with ordinary morality? Here game roles are too artificial to be of much use. But many other impersistent roles exist: for example, *volunteer* at a community festival. One might think that it is never permissible to violate ordinary morality for something so inconsequential. But on the contrary, the continued existence of an institution like a festival requires that volunteers fulfil role obligations without full understanding that their action is morally best (e.g., selling water at a seemingly high price with no exceptions). Some authors argue it is permissible to violate ordinary morality only when one knows that the institution is good and the role and obligation are required for the institution (Dare 2016:715, following David Luban)—but for impersistent roles, that fix too is implausibly onerous for all involved. The lesson is that, in a functioning society, some roles must be

taken up solely on trust and deference, despite a risk of violating ordinary morality. This trust can be abused, though, which highlights the importance of an ordinary morality check on role obligations, as in Hannah Arendt's understanding of 'conscience' (1964).

2.30–3.20 Sara Chan
The University of Notre Dame

The Authority of Personal Testimony about Disability

Disability is standardly held to be bad. On the other hand, however, disabled people within the Disability Rights movement frequently testify positively about their disability: they claim that they value their disability and insist that they would not wish to become non-disabled if given a risk-and-pain-free opportunity to do so. Suppose you believe that disability is bad, but then you hear that some disabled people do not take themselves to be worse off. What are you to make of it? According to Elizabeth Barnes, you should "take their word for it": there seems to be no principled non-circular explanation for why disabled people would be systematically wrong about their own lived experience, so failure to take it seriously risks propagating testimonial injustice.

What, however, does taking disability-positive testimony seriously entail? Much of the literature on disability-positive testimony has focused on combatting the ingrained prejudice against the very idea that disability could be mere difference. In contrast, comparatively little attention has been paid to what epistemic attitudes one should take (beyond refraining from dismissing it out of hand). This paper seeks to address that lack. I begin by examining the link between lived experience and authority over whether disability is mere difference and argue that it is doubly suspect: first because it is possible to be mistaken about how well-off one is, and second because although claims about one's own disability may be grounded in lived experience, the mere difference claim is a claim about disability in general, which cannot be grounded in any single person's lived experience. I then argue that although the move from accepting testimony as authoritative to accepting its conclusion can be grounded on Linda Zagzebski's influential account of epistemic authority, that account is ill-suited to the mere difference debate because of specific features of that debate, namely the layperson-accessible nature the debate as well as the existence of disability-negative testimony. Ultimately, I argue that taking personal testimony about disability seriously is not as simple as just accepting the mere difference view on its authority; rather it involves a more nuanced approach to the different kinds of testimony, whereby one weights testimony about what disabled life is like for individual persons more heavily, and on the basis of these resources, then does the hard work of evaluating whether the mere difference view is true of disability in general.

4.30–5.20 Hugh Robertson-Ritchie
The University of Kent

"Why some disease definitions are more trouble than they are worth, and what we could do instead."

"The definitions for some medical conditions are greatly beneficial for individual patient care, and for guiding the selection of patients for medical research. On the other hand, I contend that the definitions for chronic fatigue syndrome/myalgic encephalomyopathy (CFS/ME) do not help us enough for patient care, nor for selecting patients for medical research. More than that, the definitions of CFS/ME may be obfuscating the essence of this condition, preventing understanding, interfering with patient care, and hindering research.
 In order to show the distinction between helpful and unhelpful disease definitions, I contrast the definitions of CFS/ME with definitions of conditions that have some symptoms in common with it, myxoedema (thyroid deficiency), and depression. "

10:10–11.00 Brian Kett
The University of Kent

Causation: Another facet or more?

Explanations for predictions made by AI are increasingly being sought. Explanations need understanding and a prime route to understanding is through recognising how causal mechanisms and processes occur. To establish causation, Evidential Pluralism argues that both statistical and mechanistic evidence is needed. AI models, built from learning from data provide statistical evidence for causality, but cannot provide mechanistic evidence. To gain evidence of causality it is necessary to have grasp of what causality is and how it works. This is needed as a pre-requisite to determining how we can leverage understanding and explanation from AI models.

The aim of this exposition is to look at how we currently view causation and what extra is needed to understand what causality is and how it works. It is suggested that existing theories all uncover facets of what causation comprises, but that they do not uncover the commonality of mechanisms of causality in enough detail to recognise what evidence of causality itself is needed to establish it.

After a brief review of some existing theories we propose a unifying view of causation that may help in underpinning ways to establish the mechanistic evidence for causation we seek.

11.00–11.50 Vittorio Serra
The University of Kent

Reality versus fiction in Peirce

Reality has often been elaborated as a distinction between the physical and the mental or as between the natural and artefactual. But for Charles Sanders Peirce, neither of these can be correct. The occurrence of a dream – a mental event – is just as real as the occurrence of any physical event; and a house, once built, is as real as any tree. Rather, the distinction to be made is between the real and the fictional. However, this distinction may also be problematic.

Peirce has two characterisations of reality: that which is as it is, irrespective of anyone's opinion about it; and that which is represented in a true representation. The problem is that these two can seem to come apart in that we can have true representations of fictions as well as of realities. A solution to this can be found in recent Peirce scholarship – such as Lane (2017) – that highlights Peirce's three grades of clarity of a concept. The definition – the second grade of clarity – of

reality is that which is as it is irrespective of anyone's opinion about it, while Peirce's second characterisation is of the third grade of clarity, arrived at by applying the maxim of pragmatism to the concept. The two characterisations are thus all of a piece: they are clarifications of the same concept and do not come apart. Moreover, one does not replace the other but we need both of them together.

11.50–12.40 Shih-Hao Liu
University of Miami

Philosophical Skepticism, Unconceived Serious Objections, and Modal Skepticism

As philosophers, we construct arguments to support theses and fend off received objections with our best efforts. However, there are times that we receive serious objections that contain counterarguments which we never expect and cannot effectively respond to at the scene. Call these objections unconceived serious objections. Some skeptics contend that the consideration of these unconceived serious objections motivates a new form of argument for metaphilosophical skepticism. The argument can be roughly formulated as follows:

P1. I cannot rule out there's no unconceived serious objection to the philosophical thesis I believe in.

P2. If I cannot rule out there's no unconceived serious objection to the philosophical theory I believe in, then I should suspend judgment regarding the philosophical thesis.

Conclusion. I should suspend judgment regarding the philosophical thesis.

In this paper, I'll offer an anti-skeptics response to the argument above in the spirit of modal skepticism. I first point out that for the argument to get off the ground, it'll have to assume we have source of justification to believe unconceived serious objections are possible. In previous literature, there are two ways to offer justification of the possibili.es: induction from the history of philosophy (Frances 2016; Mizrahi 2014) and conceivability (Ballantyne 2013). I'll argue that they both fail to provide justification to serve metaphilosophical skeptics need. I argue that induction fails since it does not include the consideration of the heterogeneous nature of unconceived serious objections to different philosophical theses. I argue that to justify possible unconceived serious objections to different theses specifically, more detail needs to be addressed on how different theses are refuted specifically as well. And this cannot be done simply by induction. Second, I argue that conceivability fairs no better by offering a dilemma. I first distinguish between genuinely conceiving and merely appearing to conceive a serious-objection-containing scenario. I 1 argue that for us to genuinely conceive the serious-objection-containing scenario more detail should be conceived (like the content of serious objections), but this will make the possible objections at hand collapse into actual objections. On the other hand, if the details are under described, then the conceived scenario will be too weak to offer justification. I conclude that the failure of both justificational routes marks the failure of metaphilosophical skeptics' argument as well.

1.40–2.30 Marlon Rivas Tinoco
The University of Georgia

Believing rationally given your actual beliefs: on one objection to Susanna Rinard's theory of rational beliefs

The question of whether practical considerations can be reasons for holding a belief has two traditional responses. Evidentialists such as Feldman and Conee (1984) and Kelly (2002) argue that a belief is rational only if it aligns with the evidence, meaning that we shouldn't believe for practical considerations. On the other hand, pragmatists such as James (1979) and Rinard (2015) argue that beliefs can also be rational if they serve the agent's benefits. Thus, there may be occasions where we should believe something even though we do not have evidential reasons for doing so.

Susanna Rinard (2017, 2019, 2022) offers a more refined pragmatist view, suggesting that the rationality of a belief is solely determined by its usefulness in achieving the agent's practical goals. This assessment is based on another belief (or a set of

beliefs) held by the agent about why the belief is worth holding. However, David Christensen (2020) disputes this idea, arguing that a belief's rationality cannot be solely based on practical considerations. He provides counterexamples of irrational beliefs that still maximize utility.

In this paper, I challenge Christensen's objections to Rinard's theory. First, I introduce Rinard's theory of belief rationality, emphasizing that it does not only endorse a pragmatist commitment, but also an internalist one. I show that this latter commitment is explained by the presence of an evaluative outlook that enables the agent to assess the rationality of new beliefs. Second, I introduce Christensen's cases that allegedly debunk Rinard's thesis that beliefs are rational only given the current beliefs that the agent has. Then, I refine Rinard's theory of rationality by arguing that the rationality of an agent's belief can be based on what is best for them given their existing beliefs, emotions, or perceptual experiences. I will contend that some of the agent's perceptual experiences and emotional episodes must be included in their evaluative outlook for assessing the rationality of a new belief. Lastly, I will argue that Christensen's cases ignore the complex nature of the agent's deliberation, so I will redescribe the cases he presents as cases that shed light on how people ordinarily deliberate in everyday life when undergoing tensions between their mental states. I will contend that the refined version of Rinard's theory that I propose can offer a clearer picture than Christensen's analysis of why the reframed Christensen's cases are cases of irrationality.

2.30–3.20 Petar Nurkic
University of Belgrade

Epistemic Jenga: How to Build a Trustworthy Scientific Team

The epistemic characteristics of our daily activities and interactions are significant. Whether it is deciding what to purchase in the supermarket, where to go for the winter holidays, choosing theatre tickets, or believing in the recommendations of experts we observe on television screens, epistemic networking is ubiquitous. Our everyday life is one big epistemic community and an informational environment that imposes cognitive demands on us. This includes forming beliefs, justifying the truthfulness of those beliefs, and acting on those epistemic intakes. One of the critical factors of any epistemic community is the time during which an epistemic process envelops, and true beliefs are acquired. Numerous theories within laboratory ethnography suggest how to structure the diversity of scientific teams so that the period for which they achieve significant epistemic successes and scientific discoveries is as brief as possible (Zollman, 2007; Zollman, 2010; Muldon, 2013). Our presentation aims to borrow these epistemic models to examine how best to structure epistemic experts and divide their labour to reach a satisfactory level of trust that other epistemic agents have in them in the shortest possible time.

In this way, we achieve two goals: first, we will examine what kind of errors can occur in communication between epistemic experts (such as virologists, epidemiologists, and immunologists) and other epistemic agents; and second, based on these errors, we will offer a strategy that avoids the heuristics and biases that can occur in poorly structured information proliferation. To accomplish this, we will use the aforementioned models of division of scientific work and examine specific situations within countries such as Serbia, the USA, and New Zealand (Shaffer, 2009; Radenović & Nurkić, 2021). The nodes of our epistemic model will be relevant ethical and political factors within the epistemic community, such as the social well-being of citizens, the sustainability of the healthcare system, a populist-rhetorical strategy aimed at strengthening the authority of the epistemic expert, and the economic consequences of a given crisis.

According to the aforementioned epistemic nodes, data sampling will be done through a qualitative analysis of media statements given by epistemic medical experts and political decision-makers. We hope that the offered analysis will illustrate that it is possible to bridge the gap between political and ethical aspects within epistemic communities and the formal structural nature in the philosophy of science of this problem, thereby providing a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the factors that influence trust in science.

3.40–4.30 Maria Skoutaridou
The University of Kent

Mill's idea of individuality in On liberty: utility or virtue?

In *On Liberty* Mill argues that individuals should have the freedom to pursue their own ends and the right to express themselves freely, without fear of censorship or persecution. Individual freedom should not be restricted unless it is to prevent harm to others, which is known as the harm principle. He believes that society benefits from allowing people to express themselves and follow their own path, because new ideas and ways of thinking can emerge as a result of human flourishing. Therefore, in *On Liberty*, Mill will become one of the most vocal advocates of individual liberty, a notion of great importance within the liberal tradition. However, what differentiates Mill's ideas regarding the individual from former and later conceptions of the self within the liberal tradition is the fact that he embraces *individuality* and rejects atomistic individualism, which liberal theories are often accused of promoting. The idea of *individuality* in Mill and his passion for defending individual liberty rendered the essay a densely argued book. Scepticism regarding his moral and political theory is resulting mostly from the fact that Mill appears to be shifting between utilitarianism and liberalism. *On Liberty* has indeed many controversial parts such as when he offers the harm principle as the "absolute principle to the dealings of society", which puts him at odds with his utilitarianism; a utilitarian holds the principle of utility as the highest, how can Mill therefore, suggest a principle other than utility as absolute? The question thus arises whether Mill remains loyal to his utilitarianism or not. Ryan (1998) and Ladenson (1977) do not believe that by defending individual freedom and rights Mill abandons his utilitarian ideas, but rather that he justifies freedom by its utility. However, Levi (1959) argues that the idea of *individuality* as self-development or *self-invention* resembles the Aristotelian idea of human excellence and that therefore Mill in On Liberty departs towards a rather Aristotelian perspective. This talk will explore these themes and also offer a resolution to the tension between the Ryan-Ladenson and the Levi interpretation.

4.30–5.20 Levi Smith
Western Michigan University

Considering Inductive Risk in the Context of COVID-19

Abstract: Many philosophers of science such as Hempel (1965) and Schroeder (2022), endorse the argument from inductive risk (AIR) which states that prior to accepting an inductive inference, a scientist ought to consider the seriousness of non-epistemic consequences which could predictably occur if she is wrong. Therefore, AIR promotes instances of *non-epistemic values* being evaluated with *epistemic consequence* during internal scientific reasoning. In this essay I consider AIR in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the inductive risks which scientists consider in emergency scenarios. I borrow an example from Lichtenstein (2022) who considers a case where Dr. Anthony Fauci—purportedly—told the general public in early 2020 that masking was likely ineffective in an attempt to save scarce PPE for health-workers. Lichtenstein (2022) states that although AIR is "fundamentally sound," Dr. Fauci's statement cannot be justified with AIR since considerations of the wellbeing of health-workers are only

incidentally tied to considerations of the efficacy of masking. I argue that emergency situations, like the one described above, illustrate several problems for AIR. The first problem arises from the plurality of non-epistemic values which could reasonably be considered to have epistemic consequences with AIR. Proponents of AIR do not bar unmeasurable values from being considered, so broad values—such as justice, truth, and duty—could reasonably be considered during internal scientific inference. I contend that many cases, such as that of Dr. Fauci's statements regarding masking, could be reasonably considered both justified and unjustified if AIR permits broad values. Additionally, I argue that an inference which is justified due to a contextually relevant inductive risk likely hinders future scientific research. This is because scientific research often builds off of previous scientific research. In such situations the inductive risk present in the original scientific research may not be significant in the future research but—if AIR is followed—it could inappropriately affect the future research. Finally, I argue that scientists ought to distinguish between inferential rules and action rules in order to prevent harmful and unnecessary value-laden inferences. My view states that the internal reasoning processes of science should minimize considerations of non-epistemic values. However, actions made by the scientists ought to be based off of value-laden inferences. I contend that such a system resolves the two issues which I discuss in this essay while maintaining the benefits which proponents of AIR claim.