



DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY *of* WASHINGTON

THE 5TH BIENNIAL UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

GRADUATE STUDENT CONFERENCE IN PHILOSOPHY

November 13 & 14, 2009

Theme: Moral Psychology

CONFERENCE SCHEDULE

Friday

3:30 PM KEYNOTE ADDRESS

“Responsibility and Mental Agency”

Pamela Heironymi (UCLA)

Savery Hall, Room 264

5:30 PM RECEPTION (Savery Hall Third Floor Philosophy Department Table)

Saturday (all sessions in Savery Hall Room 264)

9:00 – 9:30 LIGHT BREAKFAST PROVIDED (Savery Hall Room 264)

9:30 – 10:20 SESSION 1: “Responsibility and Affective Skills in the Psychopath”
Garrett Pendergraft (University of California, Riverside)

Abstract: It is plausible to claim that psychopaths are not responsible for their actions owing to some sort of neural damage that correlates with psychopathic behavior. And yet, as Antony Duff has pointed out, if we want a satisfying explanation of why the agent in question is not responsible for that behavior, we must move beyond mere neural phenomena to identify some psychological or moral incapacity that is also associated with psychopathic behavior. My claim is that we also need to situate the relevant incapacity within a comprehensive theory of moral responsibility. Only then will we have a truly satisfying explanation of why psychopaths should not be considered responsible for their behavior. In support of this claim, I will first present an argument, from Fine and Kennett, that identifies psychological incapacities that are correlated both with certain sorts of brain damage and with psychopathic behavior. I will then consider this argument in light of two

different theoretical frameworks. The first, Susan Wolf's "sane deepself" view, is illustrative for its inability to incorporate the argument; Fischer and Ravizza's reasons-responsiveness theory, on the other hand (with a little help from Peter Strawson's picture of the reactive attitudes), offers a framework within which we can situate an explanatorily powerful defense of the claim that psychopaths are not responsible.

COMMENTS: Janice Moskalik (University of Washington)

10:30 – 11:20 SESSION 2: "Irresistible Motivation"
Todd Beattie (Princeton University)

Abstract: The kleptomaniac, the heroin addict, and the victim of extreme duress – examples of "compulsive" agents – are often thought to act from irresistible motives. According to a simple counterfactual theory, an agent acts from an irresistible motive if and only if, at the time of action, there is no possible counterincentive that would have motivated her to do otherwise. The simple theory falls prey to a counterexample from Gary Watson [1999], involving an agent who acts from one irresistible motive, but would have acted from another, stronger irresistible motive had he confronted the right sort of counterincentive. In this paper, I consider two sophisticated counterfactual theories that improve upon the simple theory: John Martin Fischer's and Mark Ravizza's [1998] "reasons-responsive mechanism" theory and Michael Smith's [2003] "rational capacities" theory. While both theories have the resources to avoid Watson's counterexample, I provide independent arguments for rejecting them. I begin by constructing a case, structurally similar to Watson's, which constitutes a counterexample to Fischer and Ravizza's theory. Then I argue that Smith's theory fails to draw a distinction between the compulsive agent, who lacks the capacity to resist the desire on which he acts, and the agent who possesses that capacity but is disposed not to exercise it, a phenomenon constitutive of certain bad habits.

COMMENTS: Jason Benchimol (University of Washington)

11:30 – 12:20 SESSION 3: "Hard Feelings and Forgiveness"
Grant Rozeboom (Stanford University)

Abstract: Here I contest the common claim that the forswearing of hard feelings is either necessary or sufficient for forgiveness. While various philosophers have argued, usually in passing or indirectly, that this assertion is partially mistaken, I hope to make headway here by directly countering this claim in its entirety. In short, I contend, by way of two thought-experiments, that the forswearing of hard feelings

has no essential or explanatory relation to forgiveness because it is neither necessary nor sufficient for it. Along the way, I answer several objections defending various versions of the common belief (that forgiveness requires, or can be achieved by, the forswearing of hard feelings). In order to reasonably accommodate the intuitively strong nexus persons draw between forgiveness and the forswearing of hard feelings, I conclude by discussing the distinction between “bringing oneself to forgive” and “forgiveness,” arguing that the forswearing of hard feelings properly functions only under the auspices of the former. This should help explain both why it is natural to think that one must forswear hard feelings “in order” to forgive and why closer analysis reveals that the forswearing of hard feelings is neither necessary nor sufficient for forgiveness.

COMMENTS: Patrick Smith (University of Washington)

12:20 – 1:30 LUNCH (on your own)

1:30 – 2:20 SESSION 4: “Evaluation without Hyper-intellectualisation”
Avery Archer (Columbia University)

Abstract: According to unqualified versions of the “guise of the good” theory of desire, an agent desires φ only if that agent believes that φ is good. Such theories make having the belief that φ is good a necessary condition for desiring φ . However, this precludes the possibility of nonlinguistic animals—that lack the concept of the good—from having desires. In this paper I offer an alternative to the unqualified “guise of the good” theory of desires, which allows for the possibility of nonlinguistic animals having desires. To this end, I argue that to desire φ is for φ to be evaluated as good by some subsystem of the agent, where the criterion of evaluation is determined by the agent’s biological context. The aim of the proposed account is to preserve an evaluative conception of desires without falling prey to hyper-intellectualisation.

COMMENTS: Rachel Fredericks (University of Washington)

2:30 – 3:20 SESSION 5: “Liberal Universalism and How We Understand the Past”
George Tsai (University of California, Berkeley)

Abstract: This paper examines a challenge raised by Bernard Williams that “liberal universalism” should provide a theory of error explaining why people of the past did not accept liberal values. Williams suggests that the liberal universalist is committed

to the view that past people were non-liberal because they were either morally or cognitively deficient. After presenting liberal universalism in terms of three underlying assumptions, I argue that the liberal universalist need not be committed to Williams's suggestion because sociohistorical conditions, as limitations on epistemic accessibility and motivational availability, can also account for the fact that people in the past were non-liberal. The liberal universalist who accepts this explanation should, however, admit that he cannot provide reasons acceptable to all for endorsing liberal values and that blame of past people for being non-liberal is inappropriate. Nonetheless, the liberal universalist, I contend, can still hold onto a sense in which liberal values are universally valid and bring his liberal outlook to bear in some moral judgments about the past.

COMMENTS: Amy Reed (University of Washington)

3:30 – 4:20 SESSION 6: “Is Self-Binding Morally Wrong?”
Jeff Sebo (New York University)

Abstract: Suppose that you and your friend Doug are on a road trip, and you really want to get an early start tomorrow. Unfortunately, you know that this will be impossible if either of you drinks tonight, and you also know that both of you will want to drink tonight. So what should you do? In this case, you seem morally permitted to take certain measures to keep yourself from drinking, e.g. you can give all your beer and money to someone else to keep until morning. But you seem much less permitted to do this to Doug. You can try to persuade him not to drink tonight, but you would be crossing a line if you took all his beer, and all his money, and gave them to someone else to keep until morning.

I think that this very natural judgment is only half-right: you have a strong pro tanto duty to let Doug do what he wants, but you also have a strong pro tanto duty to let your future selves do what they want, at least sometimes. And that means that a lot of everyday cases of self-binding may actually be morally wrong.

In this paper, I argue for this conclusion in two steps. First, I present a fusion case where you and Doug gradually become different but psychologically continuous personalities in the same body, and I argue that intuitively, you still have strong other-regarding duties to each other even after this process is complete.

Second, I argue that you and Doug still have strong other-regarding duties to each other because you take a “recurring” pattern in the body you share rather than a “succeeding” pattern, and therefore you can still participate in a standard contract-based moral relationship.

COMMENTS: Fareed Awan (University of Washington)

