BODIES IN CONTEXT

EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR A DIVERSE SOCIETY

MARCH 31 - APRIL 1

PHOTONICS 901

BOSTON UNIVERSITY PHILOSOPHY GRADUATE CONFERENCE

Organized by Matilde Carrera, Casey Grippo, Jack Harris, and Lewis Wang

PROGRAM CONTENTS

WELCOME

The Department of Philosophy is thrilled to be hosting the BU Graduate Student Philosophy Conference this year on the topic of "Bodies in Contexts. Epistemological Considerations for a Diverse Society". Our two-day, in person conference will feature seven graduate student presentations and a keynote address. We will also offer a roundtable on Diversity in Academia, exploring the role that philosophy can play in fostering a more diverse and equitable environment.

This event has been organized by PhD students Matilde Carrera, Casey Grippo, Jack Harris, and Lewis Wang. The event is also generously sponsored by The Society for Applied Philosophy, BU Diversity and Inclusion, The Karbank Fellowship and Professor Dahlstrom's fund. We thank all our generous sponsor, our speakers, our fellow PhD students in the Philosophy Department, and everybody in attendance for making this event possibile.

Land Acknowledgement:
We acknowledge that the territory on which Boston University stands is that of The Wampanoag and The Massachusett People. Classrooms and BU's campus are places to honor and respect the history and continued efforts of the Native and Indigenous community leaders which make up Eastern Massachusetts and the surrounding region. This statement is one small step in acknowledging the history that brought us to reside on the land, and to help us seek understanding of our place within that history. Ownership of land is itself a colonial concept; many tribes had seasonal relationships with the land we currently inhabit. Today, Boston is still home to indigenous peoples, including the Mashpee Wampanoag and Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah). For more information, please visit the North American Indian Center of Boston and the Commission on Indian Affairs of the State of Massachusetts.

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

2:00pm   INTRODUCTION

2:15pm   KATIE VIDUEIRA
University of California, Riverside

"The Constitution of Socially Damaged Agents"

Commentator: Caroline Wall

3:15pm   ELLE KIRSCH
University of Pennsylvania

"How Anger Produces Distinct Epistemic Outcomes for the Oppressed"

Commentator: Pol Pardini

4:15pm   COFFEE BREAK

4:30pm   URNA CHAKRABARTY
Cornell University

"How Fat Horrifies: On Anti-Fat Bias as Phobia"

Commentator: Rosalie Looijaard

5:30pm   **KEYNOTE ADDRESS: Professor Rima Basu**
Claremont McKenna College

"The Morality of Beliefs"

7:30pm   DINNER

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

10:00 am   BREAKFAST

10:30 am   RAY PEDERSEN
University of Minnesota
"(Mis)gendering & (Mis)directed Attention"

Commentator: Eleanor Oser

11:30 am   FELIPE E. OLIVEIRA
Syracuse University
"The Necessary & Sufficient Conditions for Mansplaining"

Commentator: Alexa Li

12:30 pm   LUNCH

2:00 pm   ALICE ELIZABETH KELLEY
University of Michigan
"Grief, Health, and Medicalization"

Commentator: Jack Harris

3:00 pm   JOSHUA R. PETERSEN
University of Michigan
"Neurodivergence and Normative Signals"

Commentator: Aja Watkins

4:30 pm   ROUNDTABLE: DIVERSITY IN ACADEMIA (STH 525)

6:00 pm   DINNER / DRINKS

Rima Basu

Claremont McKenna College

"The Morality of Belief"

It is no surprise that we should be careful when it comes to what we believe. Believing false things can have costly consequences. The morality of belief, also known as doxastic wronging, takes things a step further by suggesting that certain beliefs can not only be costly, they can also wrong. This is a surprising thesis as most people grant that although morality has a say in governing our public life, our inner life is our own. That is, morality only enters into our inner lives insofar as our private thoughts can dispose us to act in criticizable ways or say criticizable things. However, according to the morality of belief, morality governs our inner lives simpliciter. That is, our beliefs themselves, irrespective of how they may dispose us to act, can wrong. Perplexed, you might now ask, how exactly do beliefs wrong? In this talk, I'll survey some answers and also some challenges to those answers.

SPEAKERS

KATIE VIDUEIRA

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, RIVERSIDE

Katie is interested in the nature of agency, practical reason, and personal identity. She is particularly interested in understanding the intersection of these three concepts from the lens of marginalized or non-traditional agents.

ELLE KIRSCH

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Elle's research lies at the intersection of epistemology and social philosophy, with a particular interest in exploring the relationship between knowledge and power, especially with respect to epistemic injustice.

URNA CHAKRABARTY

CORNELL UNIVERSITY

Urna works in social and political philosophy (particularly feminist theory), ethics, and the history of philosophy.

RAY PEDERSEN

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Ray's research interests span philosophy of physics, metaphysics, and feminist epistemology. More specifically, their work concerns how we conceptualize the physical properties of ordinary objects in various metaphysical accounts of quantum mechanics, while simultaneously interrogating how systems of oppression shape agent-relative and global epistemic outcomes, both through the history of physics and in the modern context.

SPEAKERS

FELIPE E. OLIVEIRA

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

Felipe's research is in two main areas: (i) the intersection of metaethics and epistemology (especially theories which explain doxastic normativity), and (ii) the application of metaethical and epistemological frameworks to issues in the philosophy of gender and race, and social and political philosophy (with an affinity for conceptual engineering projects).

ALICE ELIZABETH KELLEY

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

A central guiding theme of Alice's current research is the role that responding to loss plays in human health, flourishing, and enhancement.

JOSHUA R. PETERSEN

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Josh's research spans epistemology and political/legal philosophy. Right now, he's interested in how we should establish social institutions given our diverse epistemic communities.

ABSTRACTS

Katie Vidueira — THE CONSTITUTION OF SOCIALLY DAMAGED AGENTS

Most theories of practical rationality take the structure of rational agency to be consistent across different rational agents. Agents obviously have differences such as different skin colors, genders, and economic backgrounds – just to name a few. However, most theories take these differences into account as inputs of deliberation. They influence the beliefs and desires an agent has or they may help determine the weight an agent gives to a certain reason over another. These differences, however, are just inputs. They do not shape the structure of rational agency in any way. This would mean that the way the white American male exercises his agency rationally is the same way the black American female exercises her agency. Therefore, they can both be evaluated by the same standards.

In this paper, I investigate the agency of what I call 'socially damaged agents'. These are rational agents who reason under circumstances that require the agent to be aware that others perceive them as inferior or less valuable simply because of their membership in some group. I argue this awareness, or this 'double-consciousness,' becomes internalized in these agents, causing them to constantly deliberate from two evaluative standpoints. This internalization is a constitutive feature of socially damaged agency which re-structures their agency. I argue we can derive a normative principle from this constitutive feature that rationally guides the SDA: the inferiority awareness principle. I conclude with a discussion regarding the autonomy and authenticity of these agents, ultimately arguing that, although the agent's autonomy is not undermined, her authenticity is.

Elle Kirsch — HOW ANGER PRODUCES DISTINCT EPISTEMIC OUTCOMES FOR THE OPPRESSED"

Standpoint epistemology holds that the oppressed, in virtue of their social identity, have an epistemic advantage over the non-oppressed when it comes to knowing the workings of oppression. Philosophers have proposed various theories for how this advantage occurs: the presence of a dual-awareness encompassing both the oppressed and non-oppressed viewpoints, hermeneutical lacunas leading to the oppressed's acquisition of different epistemic resources, and even deeper and more complex emotions enriching the knowledge of the oppressed. However, in this paper I propose a new account. I argue that the anger of the oppressed gives rise to the distinct epistemic outcomes they experience. I begin by detailing how oppression gives rise to anger, namely through the asymmetry it enacts between oppressed and non-oppressed. I then distinguish between the kinds of anger the oppressed feel and the kinds of anger the non-oppressed feel. With this contrast on the table, I argue that the anger the oppressed experience comes with a shift in self-conception. This shift involves the oppressed either affirming or reaffirming their worth, morally and as a knower. In this (re)affirmation, the oppressed not only perhaps see themselves differently, but also gain intimate knowledge of how oppression works. Finally, I conclude by arguing that my theory based on anger avoids the pitfalls of the view that emotions in general give the oppressed an epistemic advantage. Also, as a political emotion, anger is uniquely situated to capture the political nature of oppression.

ABSTRACTS

Urna Chakrabarty — HOW FAT HORRIFIES: ON ANTI-FAT BIAS AS PHOBIA

This paper explores the extent to which fatphobia, or the systematic oppression of fat bodies, is in fact a horror-based phenomenon. The term 'phobia' denotes an excessive, irrational, lasting, and uncontrollable fear of a particular object, situation, or activity. Given this definition, what role does the use of the term 'phobia' play in designating anti-fat prejudice? The answer, according to some recent literature in the fat liberationist field, is "none", because the eliminationist discrimination that fat people face is a structural phenomenon, powered by biases that seem to stem from hate and intolerance, rather than fear. If this is the case, it seems right to replace the term 'fatphobia' with 'anti-fatness' or 'anti-fat bias', insofar as these new terms illuminate the systematic nature of the prejudice that targets fat bodies. In my view, this is a salutary shift in focus. At the same time, there still is a key element of anti-fat bias that is decidedly inflected with horror. I locate this horrifying element in our aesthetic response to fat bodies. Further, I suggest that disgust, or repulsion, forms the main current of the fear response to fat bodies. Upon examining the roots of the widespread repulsion-based horror towards fat bodies, I explore whether it helps or hurts fat people to cast their oppression in terms of dehumanization, in the context of the horror-inflected anti-fat bias that they are subject to. After fielding certain objections to my fear-based account of anti-fat bias, I propose a counter-framing of fatness in more productive, agential terms.

Ray Pedersen — (MIS)GENDERING & (MIS)DIRECTED ATTENTION

With improved social cognition around gender diversity over the recent decades has come the urgent need for updated social norms concerning the use of gendered language. In some social contexts, it has become common to share one's pronouns along with one's name while making introductions. Though this practice may reduce the incidence of misgendering that a person experiences, it has numerous disadvantages, particularly for trans, nonbinary, and gender non-conforming individuals. Such individuals may feel pressure to either out themselves before they are ready, or to intentionally misgender themself and invite misgendering by others. In response to this concern, Dembroff and Wodak (2018) put forth a proposal advocating for the abandonment of gendered language. However, their account is inadequately responsive to the harms of misgendering, and risks depriving trans individuals of the gender euphoria associated with the use of correct gendered language in reference to them. In this paper, I first develop a taxonomy of types of misgendering, then propose a set of desiderata for an adequate norm for the use of gendered language. Next, I draw from the epistemology of attention to defend my claim that we ought not use gendered language in reference to strangers. I argue that rather than sharing our pronouns with our names every time we make a new acquaintance, we ought only refer to each other with gendered language when requested and as an act of closeness and recognition in friendships and other intimate relationships.

ABSTRACTS

Felipe E. Oliveira

THE NECESSARY & SUFFICIENT CONDITIONS FOR MANSPLAINING

Existing philosophical analyses of mansplaining are scant (i.e. Johnson 2020, and Dular 2021). They are also either limited in scope or offer an overly narrow set of conditions for identifying mansplaining, leaving several instances of the phenomena unaccounted for and unexplained. This paper provides a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for identifying all instances of mansplaining, thereby providing the most comprehensive theory of mansplaining to date. In so doing, the paper—an ameliorative conceptual engineering project—suggests an expansion of the concept of mansplaining on three fronts. First, mansplaining can occur even if the mansplainer is more knowledgeable than the explainee. Second, mansplaining can happen even if the gender bias of the mansplainer is not epistemic: any gender bias may be sufficient to instigate mansplaining. Third, both the mansplainer and explainee can occupy any gender identity—mansplaining does not merely occur from men towards women. A defense of these three theses leads to the following view: for any conversational exchange between agents M and W (regardless of their gender), about subject s, M mansplains s to W if and only if (i) M explains s to W, (ii) M explains s to W because of M's gender bias (of any kind) against women directed towards W, and/or favorable bias towards men directed towards M themselves. This is a fully internalist account of mansplaining—whether or not someone mansplains depends entirely on facts about the psychology of the mansplainer, not on facts about the world which are external to the mansplainer's psychology, such as social and political conditions or the psychology of the explainee. Objections to this account of mansplaining are considered, and replies offered.

Alice Elizabeth Kelley

GRIEF, HEALTH, AND MEDICALIZATION

Mental disorder classifications are interactive kinds. Interactive kinds are classifications in which the classification schema may interact with the thing classified and vice versa. So, to say that mental disorder classifications are interactive kinds is to say that our social understanding of any particular mental disorder interacts with, and changes, both the expression of that disorder, who counts as having it, and how people (including those diagnosed) perceive those with the diagnosis. These interactions are commonly referred to as "looping effects". That looping effects are relevant for determining the costs and benefits of classifying a particular constellation of symptoms as a disorder (this process of classification is known as "medicalization") has been noted in the literature. However, their significance with regards to a controversial new psychiatric classification – Prolonged Grief Disorder - has not been adequately explored. The controversy surrounding PGD is due, in large part, to concerns about harmful looping effects. More specifically, opponents of PGD's inclusion in the DSM are concerned that (i) including PGD in the DSM may alienate grievers from their grief and alter their self-conception in problematic ways and (ii) including PGD in the DSM may pathologize a normal aspect of the human experience. This paper argues that these concerns are less troubling than they initially appear and that including prolonged grief disorder in the DSM may actually have beneficial looping effects, including positive effects on patient self- conception. Additionally, this paper argues that concern (ii) relies on an unhelpful understanding of the concepts of "health", "health conditions", and the domain of healthcare. A modified version of Kukla's (2014) institutional account of health conditions is offered as a preferable alternative.

ABSTRACTS

Joshua R. Petersen

NEURODIVERGENCE AND NORMATIVE SIGNALS

We exercise normative powers when we "change a normative condition" through, for example, consenting (Raz 2022, 162). There are usually things you must *do* to successfully use your normative powers, and they're often conventionally determined. This explains why signing a sheet of paper seals a contract while clapping three times probably won't. But many conventions used to perform or recognize consent require specific cognitive or physical abilities. And such abilities are not equally distributed across persons. Thus, it's a matter of disability justice which conventions we allow to shape normative interactions, as some will place unfair burdens on people of varying abilities.

To argue this, I propose and respond to an objection to Jorgensen's (2019) view of consent. She argues that: (1) consent-based interactions are coordination problems to be solved by signaling conventions and (2) that the costs of coordination failures should fall to those who fail to cooperatively coordinate according to said convention. Let's call this the *normative signaling view* ("NSV"). Surveying empirical literature, I show that the abilities needed to coordinate according to dominant conventions aren't distributed evenly in society. As such, the NSV places undue burdens on (for example) neurodivergent people. I consider three responses to my "objection from neurodiversity." The first two attempt to exempt neurodivergent folks from the demands of standard coordination. Both fail. Instead, we should amend the NSV by adding to it an explicit ability-sensitive constraint. This "universal design" principle mitigates costs to neurodivergent people without vitiating the social spirit of Jorgensen's approach.

Diversity in Academia

ROUNDTABLE

April 1, 4:30 PM
STH 525

The recognition and appreciation of diversity lie at the intersection of the epistemological, the ethical, and the practical. How can a pluralistic epistemology be realized? What is the role of diversity as a value within our societies? Which social circumstances influence our epistemological practices?

We believe that commitment to diversity calls for a more practice-oriented philosophical discussion. How can philosophy contribute to fostering a diverse and more equitable society? How can the public be made more receptive to non-harmful epistemological practices?

Open to all BU community, this roundtable on diversity in academic contexts aims at offering a privileged space for minorities groups to voice their needs on the specific issues they face when entering academia and how philosophy can provide the necessary tools to address these concerns.

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