

Visiting speakers seminar archive

List of previous speakers and topics in the Visiting Speakers Seminar series

2017/2018

- [2018-05-02](#) Edinburgh staff seminar
- [2018-03-07](#) Maria Rosa Antognazza (King's College London)
- [2018-02-07](#) Larry Temkin, "Assessing the Goodness of Outcomes: Questioning Some Common Assumptions"
- [2018-02-21](#) Dorit Bar-On, "Crude Meaning, Brute Thought (Or: What Are They Thinking?!)"
- [2018-01-24](#) Mazviita Chirimuuta, "Prediction, Explanation, and the Limits of Neuroscience"
- [2017-12-06](#) Edinburgh staff seminar
- [2017-11-08](#) Kevin Scharp (University of St Andrews)
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- [2017-10-25](#) Penelope Mackie (University of Nottingham)
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2016/2017

- [2017-04-19](#) Staff Seminar
- [2017-03-03](#) Daniel Rothschild (University College London)
- [2017-02-03](#) Richard Yetter Chappell (York)
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- [2017-01-20](#) Ralf Bader (Oxford)
- [2016-12-09](#) Staff Seminar: Guy Fletcher & Till Vierkant
- [2016-11-04](#) Stephan Leuenberger (Glasgow)
- [2016-11-18](#) Sonia Roca-Royes (Stirling)
- [2016-10-07](#) Elizabeth Ashford (St Andrews)
- [2016-10-21](#) Adina Roskies (Dartmouth)

2015/2016

18 May 2016

Speaker: [Prof Robert Hopkins](#) (New York University)

Title: 'Imaginative Understanding, Affective Profiles and the Expression of Emotion'

Abstract: R.G.Collingwood thought that to express emotion is to come to understand it, and that this is something art can enable us to do. The understanding in question is distinct from that offered by emotion concepts. I attempt to defend a broadly similar position by drawing, as Collingwood does, on a broader philosophy of mind. Emotions and other affective states have a profile analogous to the sensory profiles exhibited by the things we perceive. Grasping that one's feeling exhibits such a profile is to understand it. That understanding differs from any involved in conceptualising the affect in question. And, I argue, engagement with the expressive character of works of art (and other artefacts) is one way to gain it.

11 March 2016

Speaker: [Maria Alvarez](#) (King's College London)

Title: 'Dispositions and Character Traits'

Abstract: We often explain why something happened by citing a disposition. For instance, we explain why a sugar cube dissolved by reference to its solubility, or why the glass shattered by reference to its fragility. Human actions are also often explained in terms of psychological or mental dispositions, for instance, we explain actions in terms of character traits such as generosity, shyness, cowardice. This talk examines character traits conceived of as psychological dispositions. I start by outlining some central features of 'paradigmatic dispositions', i.e., physical dispositions. I then examine character traits and suggest that they have

certain features that set them apart from paradigmatic dispositions. Finally, I propose some consequences that this might have for accounts of action explanations that cite character traits.

26 February 2016

Speaker: Yonatan Shemmer (University of Sheffield)

Title: 'Objectivity and Idolatry'

Abstract: Vindicating the objectivity of morality undoubtedly tops the list of philosophical obsessions. In this paper I consider the rationality of searching for such a vindication. I argue that the only justification of our efforts lie in our beliefs in moral objectivity; that these beliefs can be as well, if not better, explained by wishful thinking and other cognitive biases; that as a research community we have failed to take precautions against such biases; and that as a result we have been making disproportional and therefore irrational efforts to establish moral objectivity.

12 February 2016

Speaker: [Yujin Nagasawa](#) (University of Birmingham)

Title: 'The MaximalGod Thesis and the Modal Ontological Argument'

Abstract: In this paper I try to develop a new defence of the modal ontological argument for the existence of God. My main focus is on the so-called 'possibility premise' of the argument, the premise according to which it is possible for God to exist. Many attempts have been made to establish this premise because once it is shown to be true the modal ontological argument seems to entail the existence of God straight away as a matter of logic. I closely examine existing attempts but argue that none of them is compelling. I then introduce a new way of establishing the possibility premise by appealing, to what I call the 'maximalGod thesis'.

29 January 2016

Speaker: [Emma Borg](#) (University of Reading)

Title: 'Explanatory Roles for Minimal Content'

Abstract: A standard objection to so-called 'minimal semantics' (Borg 2004, 2012, Cappelen and Lepore 2005) is that minimal contents are explanatorily redundant as they play no role in an adequate account of linguistic communication (those making this objection include Levinson 2000, Carston 2002, Recanati 2004). This paper argues that this standard objection is mistaken. Furthermore, I argue that seeing why the objection is mistaken sheds light both on how we should draw the classic Gricean distinction between saying and implicating, and how we should think about the key philosophical notion of assertion. Specifically, it reveals that these distinctions are best understood primarily in socio-linguistic terms (resting on the degree of liability a speaker is held to have for linguistically conveyed content).

15 January 2016

Speaker: Timothy Williamson (University College Oxford)

Title: 'Model-Building in Philosophy'

Abstract: I will argue that a model-building methodology like that widespread in contemporary natural and social science already plays a significant role in philosophy. One neglected form of progress in philosophy over the past fifty years has been the development of better and better formal models of significant phenomena. Examples will be given from both philosophy of language and epistemology. Philosophy can do still better in the future by applying model-building methods more systematically and self-consciously, with consequent readjustments to its methodology. Although it is neither likely nor desirable for model-building to become the sole or even main philosophical method, its use enhances the power and reliability of philosophical thinking.

27 November 2015

Speakers: [Brian Rabern](#) & [Aidan McGlynn](#) (University of Edinburgh)

Brian Rabern: Variables under epistemic modals

Abstract: It is commonly thought that pre-Kripkean theorising concerning modal notions suffered from various confusions and conflations. The background to much of Kripke's work in this area concerns issues in the model-theoretic semantics for quantified modal logic, and the various Quinean objections to such an enterprise. Quine understood "necessity" in terms of apriority or semantical necessity (as did the modal logicians he was most immediately reacting to, e.g. Barcan Marcus and Carnap). Kripke shifts the focus to the metaphysical understanding of modality whereby he insists that it makes perfect sense talk about what properties certain objects had to have had or what properties they could have lacked. Kripke makes good on this with what is now the standard "objectual" interpretation of quantified modal logic whereby variables are rigid, and identities are necessary, etc. But imagine that instead of setting aside the "merely epistemic" modalities we isolate and investigate epistemic readings of modals with the intense focus that was placed on metaphysical modality. Is there a different verdict on de re epistemic modality, "rigidity", and contingent identities? What changes to the model-theory are required? What is the status of "quantifying in" to epistemic modals, and most directly how should we interpret variables under epistemic modals? I'll take a very preliminary stab at addressing these questions by bringing to bear certain logical and linguistic considerations.

Aidan McGlynn: How Pornography Works

Abstract: Jason Stanley's *How Propaganda Works* characterises and explores one democratically problematic kind of propaganda, 'undermining propaganda', which involves '[a] contribution to public discourse that is presented as an embodiment of certain ideals, yet is of a kind that tends to erode those very ideals' (2015: 53). Stanley's model for how undermining propaganda functions is Rae Langton and Caroline West's treatment of moves in pornographic language games. However, for

reasons we will discuss, Stanley doesn't consider whether his theory of propaganda might in turn illuminate the harmful nature of pornography, in light of the familiar contention that some pornography acts as a kind of misogynistic propaganda. Drawing on Catharine MacKinnon's writings on the topic, this paper will explore one way of developing the claim that pornography sometimes functions as undermining propaganda, in something close to Stanley's sense. Moreover, I will suggest that the discussion points to a new response to the so-called authority problem for Rae Langton's silencing argument against the protected status of pornography.

13 November 2015

Speaker: Susan Brison (Dartmouth College)

Title: 'Gender-based Violence and Epistemic Injustice'

Abstract: The claim that violently misogynistic pornography (abuse porn) causes gender-based violence (GBV) is controversial and notoriously resistant to empirical confirmation or disconfirmation. In this talk, I begin with the more generally accepted claim that GBV exists—and is a big problem—and ask: How does the existence of abuse porn—and its spillover into mainstream entertainment—affect those who have been victims of GBV and those who, at least some of the time, live in fear of it? I argue that the prevalence of abuse porn further victimizes survivors of GBV by subjecting them to testimonial and hermeneutical injustice.

30 October 2015

Speaker: Aaron Cotnoir (University of St Andrews)

Title: 'Are ordinary objects abstracta?'

Abstract: In this paper, I explore an under-represented view in the metaphysics of material objects - what I call compositional ersatzism, or the view that ordinary objects are set-theoretic constructions built from

fundamental particles. I show how ersatzists can represent any plausible mereological structure, and any non-emergent properties of macrophysical objects.

16 October 2015

Speaker: [Jonathan Dancy](#) (University of Texas at Austin and University of Reading)

2 October 2015

Speaker: [Jenann Ismael](#) (University of Arizona)

18 September 2015

21st AE Taylor lecture [Professor CDC Reeve](#) (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)

"Human Happiness as a Political Achievement in Aristotle"

2014/2015

1 May 2015

20th AE Taylor lecture [Philip van der Eijk](#) (Alexander von Humboldt Professor of Classics and History of Science, Humboldt University, Berlin)

"Clinical and ethical aspects of mental health and mental disorder in ancient philosophical and medical thought"

Abstract: I will discuss the question of how ancient philosophers and medical writers dealt with the distinction between what we would call clinical vs. ethical aspects of mental health and mental disorder. To what extent are mental (i.e. cognitive, emotional and behavioural) well being and dysfunctioning considered the aims or results of moral effort and education (or the lack of it) rather than the result of natural (and congenital) endowment, physical (and medical) training or depravity?

What criteria are used to make these distinctions, to what extent is there an overlap? What views on psychosomatic interaction underlie these distinctions? And what are the implications for questions of management and expertise, (in)corrigibility and (in)curability, and responsibility or blame? After a general introduction setting out the issues, I will focus on Hippocrates (On Regimen 35-36), Plato, Aristotle and Galen, possibly (time permitting) with a brief reference to Stoicism.

27 March 2015

Speaker: [Paulina Sliwa](#) (University of Cambridge)

13 March 2015

Speaker: [Richard Holton](#) (University of Cambridge)

13 February 2015

Speaker: Guy Kahane (University of Oxford)

Title: 'Non-identity and the past'

Abstract: Past tragedies like the Holocaust fill us with sadness and regret. By contrast, most of us are glad that we exist. But if history had taken a different turn, and these past tragedies were somehow averted, then we would almost certainly not be here. Our regret about horrific past evils, and our gladness that we exist, seem to be in tension. This existential tension is an instance of Parfit's non-identity problem, applied to the past instead of the future. In this talk, I will argue that this tension reflects an even deeper problem inherent in history itself: when we think of one possible course of history as better than another, and when we ascribe value or significance to historical events, our claims are ambiguous between conflicting impersonal and person-affecting senses. To make things worse, when we spell out these opposing impersonal and person-affecting perspectives, we find that each has highly disturbing implications. I conclude that we don't yet know how to think or feel about the past.

30 January 2015

Speaker: [Mark Jago](#) (University of Nottingham)

Title: 'What Truth Is'

Abstract: What kind of property is truth? And how does having an answer to that question help us elsewhere in philosophy? I'll argue for the strong thesis that truth is the property of having a truthmaker (and that, necessarily, every truth has a truthmaker). I'll discuss what these truthmakers might be, and what the truthmaking relation might look like. I'll also discuss how thinking about truth in this way might shape our view of what propositions, the primary bearers of truth, are. Finally, I'll ask whether any of this discussion helps us to address the philosophical paradoxes of truth, such as the Liar.

16 January 2016

Speaker: [Ofra Magidor](#) (University of Oxford) **Title:** 'Endurantism vs. Perdurantism? A debate reconsidered'

28 November 2014

Speaker: [Kenneth Walden](#) (Dartmouth College)

Title: 'Realizing respect'

Abstract: I give a reading of Kant's argument for the Formula of Humanity and recommend it on the grounds that it delivers a conclusion apparently supported by Kant and endorsed by many contemporary non-consequentialists--that the value of persons is non-aggregatable. I then explore the picture of our duties to persons that arises from this argument. In particular, I argue that on this picture these duties are mediated by actual social structures.

14 November 2014

Speaker: [Paolo Santorio](#) (The University of Leeds)

17 October 2014

Speaker: [Helen Steward](#) (The University of Leeds)

Title: 'Making the Agent Reappear: How Processes Might Help'

Abstract: A recurring theme in critiques of what has come to be called the 'standard story of human action' is that the standard story cannot provide an account of the causal genesis and ontological structure of action which gives the agent of the action an appropriate role – or indeed (on some versions of the criticism) any role - in the account. In this talk, I seek to argue that attempting to think about actions in terms of the ontological category of process instead of the category of event might help us resist some of the models and metaphors which can make it seem as though the agent simply disappears when we ask questions about the causes of actions.

3 October 2014

Speaker: Holly Lawford-Smith (The University of Sheffield)

Title: 'Collective Punishment After War'

Abstract: War is a cooperative enterprise; at least some of the wrongs perpetrated by the waging of war, and during that war, are wrongs authored by groups such as the state, the army, a particular platoon, a specific squad. In such cases, how should we think about blame for those wrongs, and the punishment that often appropriately follows such blame? In particular, which distributions of punishment from the relevant groups to their respective members are morally permissible, if any are at all? In this paper I'll argue for distribution in proportion to roles within the army hierarchy, contra the strong individualist arguments for distribution in proportion to causal contribution to the harm that have dominated much of the discussion of responsibility for the wrongs of - and within - war.

19 September 2014

Speaker: [Vasilis Politis](#) (Trinity College Dublin)

Title: 'Definition by Example in the Hippias Major: Plato's anticipation of, and response to, Geach'

2013/2014

- 28 Mar 2014: **Catherine Rowett (AE Taylor lecture)** (University of East Anglia), 'Truth and lies: why Plato's philosopher kings will believe the Noble Lie, and believe it first, precisely because they know the truth'
- 14 Mar 2014: **Susanna Siegel** (Harvard University), 'When can expertise influence perceptual experience?'
- 28 Feb 2014: **Michael Brady**, 'Reasons to Suffer'
- 14 Feb 2014: **Robyn Carston**, 'Lexical Meaning and Concept Communicated'
- 31 Jan 2014: **Caspar Hare**, 'Procreation - Before and After'
- 17 Jan 2014: **Sarah Broadie**, 'Corporeal gods, with reference to Plato and Aristotle'

2012/2013

- 22 Nov 2013: **Fraser Macbride**, 'Does Truth-Maker Methodology Rest Upon a Mistake?'
- 08 Nov 2013: **Barbara Sattler** (University of St Andrews), 'What is doing the explaining? And should we do it? An atomistic idea'
- 25 Oct 2013: **Robbie Williams**, 'Semantic teleology and semantic bookkeeping'
- 18 Oct 2013: **Brie Gertler** (University of Virginia), 'Vehicle Externalism and Agency'
- 04 Oct 2013: **Peter Fosl** (IASH, University of Edinburgh), 'Hume's Way of Saving Philosophy through Sceptical and Critical History'
- 20 Sep 2013: **Geoffrey Sayre-McCord** (UNC College of Arts

- & Sciences), 'Rational Agency and the Nature of Normative Concepts'
- 10 May 2013: **Neil Sinhababu** (National University of Singapore), 'Desire's Explanations'
- 03 May 2013: **Armin Schulz** (London School of Economics), 'Revaluing the Given: Niche Construction, Adaptive Preferences, and the Differences between Fitness and Utility'
- 26 Apr 2013: **Miranda Fricker** (University of Sheffield), 'Generating Epistemic Responsibility for Implicit Prejudice'
- 12 Apr 2013: **Penelope Mackie** (University of Nottingham), 'Counterfactuals and the Fixity of the Past'
- 22 Mar 2013: **Sarah Sawyer** (University of Sussex), 'The Importance of Fictional Properties'
- 22 Feb 2013: **Stephen Menn** (McGill University/Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin), 'Wisdom as the Science of the Four Causes?' (A.E. Taylor Lecture)
- 08 Feb 2013: **Tillmann Vierkant** (University of Edinburgh), 'The extended mental muscle or why willpower clearly is extended, even if the case for extended cognition were doubtful'
- 01 Feb 2013: **Ursula Coope** (University of Oxford), 'Reason and reflection in Aquinas'
- 25 Jan 2013: **Imogen Dickie** (University of Toronto), 'The mind has a basic need to represent things outside itself'
- 18 Jan 2013: **Robin Le Poidevin** (University of Leeds), 'Stopped Clocks, Silent Telephones and Sense Data'
- 30 Nov 2012: **Chris Heathwood** (University of Colorado), 'Irreducibly Normative Properties'
- 23 Nov 2012: **Jessica Leech** (University of Sheffield), 'Essence and Mere Necessity'
- 09 Nov 2012: **Suilin Lavelle** (University of Edinburgh), 'Understanding normativity in folk psychology'
- 02 Nov 2012: **Timothy Rosenkoetter** (Dartmouth College), 'Kant on the Semantics of Moral Terms'
- 26 Oct 2012: **Karl Schafer** (University of Pittsburgh) 'Moderate Kantian Constructivism'

- 19 Oct 2012: **Joel Smith** (University of Manchester), 'What is empathy for?'
- 12 Oct 2012: **Tim Bayne** (University of Oxford), 'Belief and its bedfellows'
- 05 Oct 2012: **Fiona Macpherson** (Glasgow University), 'The Space of Sensory Modalities'
- 28 Sep 2012: **Nick Denyer** (University of Cambridge), 'The political craft of Protagoras'
- 21 Sep 2012: **Campbell Brown** (University of Edinburgh), 'Supervenience with Relations'