

Paper Abstracts: Eight Annual Berkeley-London Philosophy Conference, May 6th-7th, 2011

John Callanan (Kings), “Kant on Mathematical and Metaphysical Concepts”

Abstract: This paper addresses a puzzle with regard to the question of Kant’s understanding of the relationship between the methods of mathematics and metaphysics. In the preface to the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant indicates that metaphysics’ success depends on its adopting the method of the mathematicians; in a later section of the first Critique, Kant explicitly warns against doing so. I’ll argue that we should in fact understand Kant’s explicit warnings as qualified, and view Kant as endorsing a unified methodology for both mathematics and metaphysics. This uniformity of methodology, I’ll suggest, is determined with regard to shared features within the procedures through which mathematical and metaphysical concepts are acquired.

Brian Berkey (Berkeley), “What is the Moderate View of Morality?”

Abstract: Many philosophers consider themselves Moderates about the demands of morality. Despite the intuitive appeal of the Moderate position, many of its proponents have been less than clear about the precise structure of the position, as they understand it. In this paper, then, I want to consider what sort of structure a plausible Moderate view might have, and how such a view might be argued for. I will suggest that it is important to distinguish two central components of the Moderate view, one of which consists in a view about the content of the correct moral principles, and the other of which consists in a view about the particular demands of morality in circumstances like ours. After clarifying this distinction, I will argue that a common form of argument for the Moderate view, which begins either from general intuitions about the limits of morality’s demandingness, or from a set of intuitions about particular cases, must be rejected as problematically question-begging against more demanding views. I will then suggest that any successful argument for the Moderate view must begin by defending a Moderate position on the content of the correct moral principles, and then attempting to establish that the relevant Moderate principles have Moderate implications regarding morality’s demands in circumstances like ours. I conclude by suggesting some reasons to doubt that any plausible set of Moderate principles can yield the Moderate’s favored conclusion about the demands of morality in circumstances like ours.

Joseph Barnes (Berkeley), “Meno Problems”

Abstract: The Meno problem, which is to explain why knowledge is in some sense better than true belief, has been misunderstood by contemporary authors. I use some considerations from the *Meno* itself to come to a better understanding of what the problem is – or, more accurately, what the problems are – as well as how to solve them. In particular, I claim that Socrates is concerned with a deeper problem than contemporary authors, and that his solution to it is one which deserves a place in an answer to that deeper problem.

Lindsay Crawford (Berkeley), “Epistemic Conciliation and Normative Conflict”

Abstract: In this paper I will try and understand the essential point of contrast between conciliationist and non-conciliationist views on the epistemic significance of peer disagreement by articulating what I take to be the core of one prominent conciliationist view, the Equal Weight View (EWV). I will focus on a

central idea that has recently been touted as a fundamental point of departure between conciliationism and non-conciliationism: how an agent may permissibly "downgrade" one's interlocutor as one's epistemic peer (a restriction I call the Conciliationist's Insight). I will argue that we can best articulate this insight as expressing a restriction on a certain pattern of reasoning, which gives us reason to understand the core of EWV as consisting in a particular set of rationality requirements. I draw on recent literature on the nature and normativity of rationality requirements to motivate this proposal. Not only does this way of looking at conciliationism, and EWV in particular, better cast the debate between conciliationists and non-conciliationists, but it sheds light on the problem of normative conflict, which I take to be a fundamental difficulty for conciliationism and which underpins apparently separate objections to conciliationism in the literature.

Tamar Lando (Berkeley), "Conclusive Reasons"

Abstract: How should we understand reasons-based knowledge? In "Conclusive Reasons," Dretske famously argued that an agent knows that P if and only if she has a conclusive reason, R, to believe that P. He went on to give an account of conclusive reasons, according to which R is conclusive for P just in case [R would not be the case unless P were the case]. I will argue that this view of reasons-based knowledge cannot succeed. I present several counterexamples to Dretske's account. I then argue that these examples show that one can believe P on the basis of in-point-of-fact conclusive reasons (reasons that satisfy the counterfactual above), while still failing to know that P. I conclude that having conclusive reasons to believe that P is not (simply) a matter of believing P for reasons that are in-point-of-fact conclusive.

Robert Bassett (Birkbeck), "Epistemic 'Might' is Right!"

Abstract: In his 2010, Yablo presents six problems for the 'standard', static semantics given for epistemic possibility statements and thereby challenges their entitlement to the description 'epistemic'. I argue that, with some modification, a standard account like that of DeRose (1991) can withstand all of the objections he raises. Specifically I propose that DeRose abandon his commitment to 'Moore's Principle', the postulation that speakers who utter 'might' statements always participate in the relevant epistemic community. It has been said that without an account of how relevance in DeRose's account is to be constrained, it is too uninformative to provide an interesting analysis. I take a small step to answer this complaint by providing one such constraint. The resulting account provides an understanding of epistemic possibility statements in terms of shared knowledge, availability of relevant information and an epistemic community.

Seamus Bradley (LSE), "Problems with Imprecise Decisions are Unavoidable"

Abstract: Imprecise probabilities offer a more psychologically reasonable account of belief than does the strict Bayesian framework. One major issue with imprecise models of belief is that decision making in this framework is a fraught affair. I pinpoint this problem and show that there is a strong sense in which it is unavoidable.

Peter Ridley (Kings), "Frege and the Mystery of Identity Statements"

Abstract: In this paper I will examine the accounts Frege gives of identity statements in 'Begriffsschrift' and 'Über Sinn und Bedeutung'. It is generally believed that Frege gives a metalinguistic account of

identity statements in *Begriffsschrift*, and an object denotational account in 'Über Sinn und Bedeutung'. However the accounts he provides and the rationale for them is very similar in both works. He certainly does not provide any refutation of the *Begriffsschrift* account in 'Über Sinn und Bedeutung'. I will consider attempts at solving this puzzle provided Mike Thau & Ben Caplan, and Gilead Bar-Elli in my investigation, concluding that neither of them provide a satisfactory explanation of Frege's intentions in each work. I will then offer my own explanation, drawing on Frege's work between the two texts, and conclude that the traditional view of his identity statement accounts is correct, and that the 'mystery' is easily defeated.

Helen Robertson (UCL), "On the Relation Between Appearances and Things in Themselves"

Abstract: The debate between two-aspect and two-world interpretations of the relation – contained in the first Critique – between the appearances and things in themselves is one which has not yet been laid to rest. This is largely due, as many debates over the interpretation of the Critique are, to Kant's complex and ambiguous formulations. It is my intention in this paper to examine a line of reasoning which lends itself to a clear sense in which the appearances and things in themselves cannot be identified. This line of reasoning does not settle the matter, but allows us to arrive at a more subtle formulation of the question. Towards the end of the paper, I briefly examine a couple of consequences of my discussion for Allison's two-aspect view. This view can potentially benefit from my reformulation of the question. Finally, I gesture at a potential understanding of the relation between the appearances and things in themselves which lines up with the points raised over the course of the paper.