

**University of Iowa Graduate Philosophical Society
In-House Conference
Saturday November 12, 2016
Iowa Memorial Union**

8:30-9:00

**Coffee and Bagels
(Northwestern Room)**

Northwestern Room

Penn State Room

9:00-9:50

Dave Babcock

Anthony Parisi

10:00-10:50

Holly Stevenson

Hyungrae Noh

11:00-12:30

**KEYNOTE
Garret Merriam
(Northwestern Room)**

12:30-2:30

LUNCH

2:30-3:20

Laura Meli

Landon Elkind

3:30-4:30

**GRADUATE KEYNOTE
Phillips Ricks
(Northwestern Room)**

Titles and Abstracts:

Dave Babcock: "A question of priority: What disorders should psychiatrists treat? What is the nature of psychiatric disorders?"

What should psychiatric classifications look like? Are there any "natural" psychiatric kinds? What would make a psychiatric kind natural? Should psychiatric kinds include social kinds or homeostatic property cluster kinds? These are questions that are currently under debate by philosophers, psychiatrists, psychologists, neuroscientists, cognitive scientists, and other related academics. In this paper I will not answer any of these questions, but will point out that what their answer looks like depends on how one prioritizes a different set of questions, i.e. what prior assumptions and theoretical commitments one has made prior to asking these questions. I will point this out by examining two views that use Richard Boyd's homeostatic property cluster kinds (HPC) as a model for their psychiatric kinds. Despite this, these theories result in kinds that look very different. One view is the mechanistic property cluster kinds (MPC) of Kendler, Zachar and Craver (KZC) (2011) which would allow different types of underlying mechanisms including, "mechanisms investigated by the molecular, physiological, computational, psychological and social sciences" (p.1148). The second is that of Jonathan Y. Tsou in his forthcoming, "Natural kinds, psychiatric classification, and the history of the DSM" in which he restricts psychiatric kinds to those which have, "a stable and distinctive biological causal stricture" (p.13). Of course it is generally accepted that descriptions of the world are theory dependent so what I claim is not new nor innovative. It will, however I hope, point out at least some of the complexity of the matter.

I begin by giving an overview of Tsou's theory. I then examine Boyd's HPC and compare the differences in KZC and Tsou's MPC kinds, both of which structure their MPC using Boyd's HPC as a model. I then discuss two questions that influence the differences in the two MPC theories. I claim it is because KZC and Tsou give different priorities to these questions that their MPC kinds look so dissimilar. My goal is to point out that a definition of psychiatric kinds is influenced, not only by a specific view of what natural kinds in general should be, but also by a view of what types of patients psychiatrists should be concerned with.

Anthony Parisi: "Equivalence in Instantiation"

Trope theorists explain similarity in terms of 'equivalence.' Unfortunately, it is not entirely clear what is meant by equivalence for a trope theorist. I will be exploring a number of different things a trope theorist might mean, reject most of these strategies, and in the end settle on a strategy of grounding equivalence in two tropes being qualitatively identical save for how they are instantiated.

Holly Stevenson: "An Argument Against the Use of the 'N' Word by Anyone, Including Those in the Targeted Group"

"As an antiracist racist I believe that I should always feel conflicted, full of contradictions, never as though I have "arrived"" (Yancy, 2008)

Racial language, specifically the use of racial slurs, is ubiquitous in the world we live in. However, the question of who should be morally permitted to use them, if anyone, is far harder to determine. This essay will be specifically focusing on the use of the "N" word and whether or not it is morally permissible for anyone, including those who are part of the racial group, to use it. Whilst my thesis could be broadened to encompass all racial slur usage, and I draw on examples of other slurs, I am primarily putting forward an argument against the use of the African-American slur given its relevance in today's society.

Firstly, I present the conundrum which the use of racial slurs presents by discussing examples of cases where the use of racial slurs appears acceptable and cases where it does not. This essay therefore focuses on the permissibility, or lack thereof, of the use of the slur from a moral standpoint, not a legal one. Whilst it is important that the latter question is addressed, it is not the focus of my discussion. I will examine what I consider to be the most compelling argument in favour of the members of the targeted racial group being morally permitted to use the racial slur by focusing specifically on the notion of reclaiming racial slurs. I aim to show that this argument is ultimately unsuccessful in providing a case for the moral permissibility of the use of this slur by the targeted racial group. Building on this, I will go on to argue that the use of the racial slur by anyone is morally impermissible. Specifically, I will focus on how the use of the racial slur promotes, whether intentionally or not, unjustified racial stereotypes. I will focus on three stereotypes which the racial slur use promotes; the stereotypes of misogyny and promiscuity, the stereotypes of criminality and immorality and stereotypes which affect employment prospects. Plainly, I will argue that the consequences of the usage of the racial slur is so detrimental to innocent individuals that it cannot be morally permissible for anyone to use it. Furthermore, I will show that it is not possible to definitively determine who classifies as being a member of the targeted racial group. Therefore, the notion of allowing the targeted racial group to use the racial slur about their group is set to fail

from the outset due to the concept of racial classifications being purely social and therefore problematically subjective. Hence, my thesis is that it is morally wrong for everyone to use the 'N' word. Given that we have so far to go in terms of striving for racial equality in America, it seems to be the case that anything, namely the use of the 'N' word, which inhibits us reaching that goal, we must aim to entirely eradicate.

Hyungrae Noh (and Carrie Figdor): "Biocommunication"

Shannon's mathematical theory of communication (MTC) quantifies the amount of information contained in transmitted messages in terms of probabilities defined over the space of possible messages in a given situation. Our first aim is to explain a relationship between quantifiable features and semantic features of biological signals (e.g., the coloration signal of poison frog). As for the second aim, we argue to the conclusion that semantics is an idealized approximation of an outcome of coevolutionary interaction between the communication (or representation) producer and consumer, namely 'biocommunication'. We first briefly present the basic MTC framework for thinking about communication. In the main section, we discuss cases of biocommunication and the development of structure and semantics within biocommunication. Throughout we will take the problem of semantics to be that of intentionality, even though MTC is in the first instance a theory of message transmission between individuals rather than within individuals. This is in accordance with philosophical discussion of intentionality, in particular Millikan's framework in which both producer (sender) and consumer (receiver) systems can be understood to be within an individual's head.

Garret Merriam: "The Uses and Abuses of Thought Experiments in Philosophy"

Recent controversies surrounding methods in philosophy have focused mostly on the dispute between experimental philosophy and armchair philosophy. In this talk I aim to draw attention to a methodological problem that cuts across both X-phi and armchair philosophy, namely the profligate use (and abuse) of thought experiments. Much of the most influential work in philosophy of both types has been driven by memorable thought experiments--think of Thomson's Violinist, Putnam's Twin Earth, Foot's Trolley Problem. While these thought experiments certainly have their value, the seductive allure of an engaging story can distract us from the limitations inherent in the method itself. To illustrate these limitations, I will deconstruct a few famous examples, with the aim of delineating the legitimate uses of thought experiments from their (far too common) abuses. I will attempt to provide constructive alternatives to these abuses, and in closing, I offer some advice on how to construct and deploy thought experiments in ways that avoid the pitfalls and plays to the strengths of this method in general.

Laura Meli: "Is Retributivism Ready for Retirement?"

In defending retributivism, many scholars have conceded that some sort of consequentialist considerations must come into play. In other words, they do not espouse pure retributivism. Defending the "pure retributivism" camp are Kant and Michael S. Moore. What are these two arguing for beyond revenge and "restoring" some sort of abstract "scales of justice"? And if nothing beyond these two aims, can we justify punishment this way?

Landon Elkind: "The Status of Sense-Data in Russell's Problems"

Russell explicitly asserts that sense-data are physical in his 1914 "The Relation of Sense-Data to Physics" (RSDP). There is good reason to believe this view is also held in Russell's *Our Knowledge of the External World*: both RSDP and *Our Knowledge* were written around the same time, and it was only after both were written that Russell presented either work publicly in his guest lecture tour of America in the spring of 1914; moreover, RSDP was published one month before *Our Knowledge*. Matters are less clear in Russell's 1912 *The Problems of Philosophy*. Russell does not explicitly say whether sense-data are mental or physical in *Problems*, and there are significant differences between the sense-data theory advocated in RSDP/*Our Knowledge* and that advocated in *Problems*. I will argue that, admitting that there is no decisive consideration either way, Russell's *Problems* is consistent with sense-data being physical. I will argue that there is no evidence that Russell changed his mind on this score either, and that the balance of the indirect evidence supports that sense-data are physical in *Problems*.

Phillip Ricks: "Brandom and Unavoidable Political Implications"

The topic of this dissertation is non-violent resistance. The concept of non-violent resistance is not new to philosophy, but typically it only comes up in the context of social and political philosophy. My discussion of non-violent resistance breaks with this convention by discussing and articulating a theory of non-violent resistance that begins by looking at theories of social practice and their corresponding accounts of the nature of normativity. Once we have situated the concept of non-violent resistance within theories of social practice and normativity generally by tracing the normative attitudes in play wherever norms are in place, we will be better equipped to apply what we have learned in the more common and specific context of social and political philosophy. Although theories of social practice enjoy widespread acceptance in various fields, from philosophy to rhetoric to social science to literary criticism and beyond, for our purposes we will focus on one exemplary theory of social practices and normativity: that of Robert Brandom, spelled out in *Making It Explicit* (1994), because it provides a useful discursive normative framework for crossing over into moral and political philosophy. In my presentation I hope to show both the utility of this framework and to spell out how it is forced to reckon with issues in political philosophy, despite Brandom's often-noted reticence to speak about the implications of his views for social and political philosophy.