

1st Annual Conference Realism and Anti-Realism

Saturday 8 November
Laurel Hall 201

Philosophy Graduate Student Association
University of Connecticut
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Keynote Speaker

Sharon Street

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Meditation and Metaethics: Reasons to Pay Attention

In the first part of the paper, I argue that those of us who work in secular analytic metaethics in the western tradition have reason to pay more attention than we have so far to the suggestion, originating with eastern meditative traditions, that the practice of meditation (and in particular, the form of meditation variously known as *mindfulness*, *insight*, or *vipassana* meditation) can serve as a path to ethical insight. I argue that contemporary analytic metaethics in the western tradition finds itself at an impasse, and that a look to eastern meditative traditions might help us to get past it.

In the second part of the paper, I offer a highly provisional sketch of the sort of metaethical view I have in mind. I begin with a discussion of Christine Korsgaard's Kantian constructivism and Thomas Nagel's non-naturalist realism, raising objections to both positions but then identifying what I think are the most promising core ideas contained within each. I then suggest that a view that appeals to the form of attention cultivated in mindfulness meditation might be able to build upon the strengths of Korsgaard's and Nagel's views, while avoiding their problems.

Proceedings

10:00 – 11:05

Chapman Waters (Purdue) "Frege's Realism: The Truth about Beauty"

Comments: Rasa Davidaviciute
Chair: Andrew Tedder

11:20 – 12:25

Vera Flocke (NYU) "Ontological Expressivism"

Comments: Nathan Sheff
Chair: Hanna Gunn

Lunch

1:30 – 2:35

Louis Gularte (Brown) "Why Conceptual Competence – if anything – Justifies Realism in a priori Domains"

Comments: Andrew Parisi
Chair: Junyeol Kim

2:50 – 3:55

Brendan Cline (Buffalo) "The Robustness of Global Evaluative Skepticism"

Comments: Nathan Kellen
Chair: Michael Robillard

Keynote

4:30 – 6:00

Sharon Street (NYU) "Meditation and Metaethics: Reasons to Pay Attention"

Chapman Waters (Purdue)

"Frege's Realism: The Truth about Beauty"

The general philosophical stance advanced by Gottlob Frege has traditionally been taken to include a commitment to a variety of metaphysical theses typically associated with the label "realism"; the past few decades, however, have seen a surge of interpretations which hold that, at the core of Frege's philosophy, are commitments which are somehow opposed to realism. In this paper I argue that it is Frege's denial of realism, in connection with one domain of discourse, which not only undermines one popular argument for interpretations of the latter sort, but establishes that Frege was, in fact, a realist about truth.

Vera Flocke (NYU)

"Ontological Expressivism"

The goal of this paper is to outline a novel version of ontological anti-realism, which I call ontological expressivism. The main thesis of ontological expressivism is that ontological existence claims express non-cognitive states of mind. In my preferred version of the view, There are numbers expresses a non-cognitive preference to populate the world with numbers. This view combines two theses: the first thesis is that ontological existence claims express meaning postulates for quantified expressions. The second thesis is that facts of ontology are a product of such meaning postulates and thus created rather than discovered. This account promises to explain the function of ontological inquiry without supposing that there are deep ontological facts. In my view, ontological disputes serve the purpose of coordinating various speakers on following the same set of postulates, which effectively means to coordinate them on a common construction of reality.

Louis Gularte (Brown)

"Why Conceptual Competence – if anything – Justifies Realism in a priori Domains"

I present a 'conceptual competence' approach to defending realism in a priori domains, as a general response to so-called 'etiological' arguments against our reliability with respect to the truths of those domains. My observation is that knowledge of truth conditions is sufficient to explain one's reliability in an a priori domain, and that conceptual competence explains knowledge of truth conditions. It follows that, *if the relevant conceptual inference rules vindicate realism*, conceptual competence is enough to explain our reliability.

Brendan Cline (Buffalo)

"The Robustness of Global Evaluative Skepticism"

Evolutionary Debunking Arguments have become an increasingly prominent strategy for motivating antirealism about particular domains of thought (e.g. Street 2006; Ruse 1986). Richard Joyce (2006, 2008, 2013, 2014) has helped popularize this argumentative strategy by employing it in his attempt to undermine moral realism. Joyce argues that moral nativism undermines the justification of our moral judgments, since it offers an explanation of our tendency to make moral judgments which does not require that those judgments are ever true. While I am sympathetic to his moral skepticism, I think Joyces position suffers from several important weaknesses. The goal of this paper is to highlight these vulnerabilities and argue that a more promising approach to debunking which supports global skepticism about value can avoid these problems. After briefly sketching Joyces account, I outline three difficulties it faces. I then show how these problems are avoided by a more robust, global skepticism about value, closing with a discussion of how these results fit in with Sharon Streets work.