Central European University

INCLUSION BEYOND FACE VALUE
Metaphilosophy of/with Social Justice

Abstracts

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Esa Díaz-Léon · Mari Mikkola · Asya Passinsky

FEATURING PRESENTATIONS BY

Nadia ben Hassine · Ajinkya Deshmukh · Paul Giladi · Yorgos Karagiannopoulos

Aleksandra Knezevic · Vivek Kumar Yadav · Sofia Porfiryeva · Hugo Ribeiro Mota

A SPECIAL PANEL WITH

Rhona J. Flynn · Martin Huth

Wednesday October 5

KEYNOTE

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Esa Díaz-Léon (University of Barcelona)

ON TWO WAYS OF AMELIORATING A CONCEPT

Abstract. In this talk, I want to argue in favor of the significance of a distinction between two notions of *amelioration* of concepts or meanings. That is, when we say that we aim to *engineer* a concept or meaning, we can mean at least two different things. On the one hand, we may be interested in the project of changing or revising the *information* associated with the term/concept. On the other hand, we might be interested in the project of changing or revising the very *referent* of the term (that is, changing its intension and/or extension). This distinction is relevant because these two projects (or these two ways of understanding amelioration) have different consequences. On the one hand, the information associated with the term is the relevant target of amelioration regarding the project of mitigating hermeneutical injustice. For that is the dimension of meaning that is accessible to the subject who suffers from hermeneutical lacunas and is trying to fully understand herself. Furthermore, the body of information associated to the term/concept is (arguably) more easily revisable– so proposals in conceptual engineering of this sort can be more easily implementable. On the other hand, I will argue that the second notion of ameliorating, concerned with changing or revising the intension or extension of the term, is the most relevant target of amelioration with regard to other purposes that the conceptual engineer might have. Firstly, when we are concerned with issues having to do with inclusion and exclusion, projects of this second sort are more crucial. For what is at issue is the intension/extension that the term/concept should have. Finally, this sort of conceptual engineering project is more relevant with respect to questions in metaphysics of the form "Are Xs real?".

FEATURING PRESENTATIONS

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Ajinkya Deshmukh (The University of Manchester)

CONCEPTUAL SOVEREIGNTY

Abstract. In this paper, I propose and defend the notion of conceptual sovereignty, the idea that members of oppressed groups must have a say in conceptual engineering or amelioration projects about them. I will begin by briefly defending the very possibility of conceptual engineering. I will then show why conceptual sovereignty is important for the groups whose identities conceptual engineering projects aim to ameliorate. Finally, I will defend conceptual sovereignty against objections by appealing to standpoint epistemology.

Nadia ben Hassine (University of Cambridge)

FINDING BETTER MEANINGS: CONCEPTUAL ENGINEERING
AND THE ARGUMENT FROM MANY ALTERNATIVES

Abstract. The increasingly popular field of conceptual engineering expresses an idea that is particularly prevalent in political philosophy: concepts do not have a single "real" meaning. The idea that such a single meaning exists and that it is a philosopher's task to uncover this meaning is increasingly replaced by the idea that meanings of concepts are historical accidents. They could have ended up meaning something else entirely if determining factors such as social and political circumstances were different at a given time. Consequentially, there is a wide range of alternative meanings available which could improve

on the meanings we have come to adopt. Which is why unlike the traditional philosopher, the conceptual engineer does not ask: "what do concepts mean", but rather asks: "what should concepts mean". This sums up the "Argument From Many Alternatives" (AMA) in conceptual engineering, the conclusion of which is that we should aim at finding better meanings for our concepts by establishing the ways in which a concept is defective and finding solutions for these defects. Within conceptual engineering, these defects are often found by establishing conceptual functions along which different versions of a concept can be evaluated. In this paper I will criticize the idea that such dimensions of assessment are readily available, as (1) it is disputable which dimensions are the "right ones" to assess a concept along and (2) even when we can establish a dimension along which improvement can take place, this can cause problems along other dimensions. In many cases, there will be a need for varying concept-meanings which are useful relative to various practices and contexts. Reconsidering the possibility of determining whether an existing meaning is better than its suggested alternative will point out that the existence of alternatives does not have to imply full replacement.

Hugo Ribeiro Mota (University of Oslo)

**STATUS-QUO MAINTENANCE
AND THE PRODUCTIVITY GAP IN PHILOSOPHY**

Abstract. Recently, a somewhat meritocratic sentiment has surfaced within the philosophical community through Peter Singer's voice (Gross 2021). Paraphrasing this view in the form of a question: *why should we work with researchers from underdeveloped countries if we already have better and more established ones in our own community?* This view is neither new or exclusive to one or two philosophers. Directly replying to this, De Cruz (2021) argues that we ought to collaborate with philosophers across the globe. She believes that not only this "meritocratic" view is mistaken, but it also presents a missed opportunity to develop better and more diverse thinking. According to De Cruz, the problem is not on the side of the underrepresented philosophers; it is the structural insularity of most anglophone western philosophy departments (Schwitzgebel et al. 2018) that has to be dealt with.

Bright (2017) and Rubin (2022) help us to see how this anglophone, male and white insularization is one of the structural causes of the productivity or citation gap in the field. This refers to a scenario where some researchers tend to publish more than others even if all are working at similar levels, leaving a gap that could make us think that the researchers that publish less are inferior or do less.

My main goal with this talk is to relate the maintenance of status-quo to the productivity gap in philosophy. Specifically, I will present how this has affected the Brazilian philosophy community by identifying some of its causes, describing its consequences to the present, and discussing possible avenues for the future.

Thursday October 6

KEYNOTE

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Asya Passinsky (Central European University)

AMELIORATIVE METAPHYSICS

Abstract. In recent years, 'ameliorative' projects have become popular in social metaphysics. Such projects have been pursued for gender (Haslanger 2000, Jenkins 2016), race (Haslanger 2000), sexual orientation (Dembroff 2016), and misogyny (Manne 2018). Yet the very idea of an ameliorative metaphysics is puzzling. On the one hand, normative and political considerations are supposed to be relevant to ameliorative enquiry. On the other hand, metaphysics is supposed to be a value-free descriptive endeavor. In this talk, I consider and reject some extant proposals for how to make sense of ameliorative metaphysics. I then propose a new way of understanding this sort of project within a broadly neo-Aristotelian conception of metaphysics.

FEATURING PRESENTATIONS

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Vivek Kumar Yadav (Indian Institute of Technology)

CULTIVATING JUSTICE: AMBEDKAR AND KING

Abstract. In recent decades, several scholars have argued that there is a persistent gap between the dominant theories of justice and the world in which we live. This study mainly focuses on two pioneering thinkers and leaders of social justice and civil rights movements in the twentieth century, Dr B. R. Ambedkar and Dr Martin Luther King, Jr. It argues that Ambedkar and King provided a unique example of how social justice can be materialized in the real world. Both thinkers were consistent in their thought and practices to achieve justice for their people. Ambedkar and King were not writing a theory of justice in a traditional academic setup. Instead, they focus on removing existing injustices and inequalities at the ground level through ethical practices and public engagements. Their passion for justice and dignity was shaped and influenced by their lived experiences and social realities. Their struggle for justice answers the questions of what aims and methods social justice philosophy needs to develop. A historically informed study of Ambedkar and King's idea of social justice will make us understand how the lived experience of segregation, humiliation and discrimination shapes one's commitment to social justice. In this context, understanding the ideas and methods of Ambedkar and King through their anti-caste and anti-racism movements will add a new insight to shape and continue the struggle against injustice and inequalities in our societies. Further, the study will conclude by explaining the importance of moral courage to achieve social justice.

Sofia Porfiryeva (Independent Researcher)

PHENOMENOLOGY TOWARDS STRUCTURAL JUSTICE

Abstract. Feminist scholars are increasingly invited into academic spaces, but for feminist research, this 'openness' has not meant actual feminist change. Thus, feminist researchers still do not have enough space to talk about the limits of space faced by most of minorities groups. As Sara Ahmed puts it, 'Things do not seem right'. As a woman in an academic space, I have experienced struggling with the supremacy of masculine, white and heteronormative philosophy fields, which leads me to conclusion that academic sphere might be a part of structural injustice. In my speech, I will propose an approach to understanding

structural injustice and map possible ways of overcoming through critical phenomenology. This approach offers us a way of suspending the hegemonic 'goes-without-saying' structure of reality to reflect on the conditions of lived experience critical phenomenology draws attention to the perceptual practices, i.e. kinesthetic experiences, embodied habits and the manner of movement. Therefore, such an approach re-opens the horizon of possibility and 'create and support more liberatory ways of being, relating, and sense-making'.

In developing my argument, I follow Guenther's approach to critique for critical phenomenology; analysis of power suggested by Iris Young; Ahmed's queer phenomenology and feminist theory. What they all offer is the practice of problematization (which should not be confused with the art of putting questions): a way to rethink key terms and not to take them for granted. Critical phenomenology is not meant to become philosophie totale since it problematized its own fundamental concepts in a (meta-)reflective way. Thus, the proposed approach may offer a tool for the structural critique of social injustice in general and in certain fields (for example, in the academic sphere)

PANEL DISCUSSION
MINORITY MINDS & EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE

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Martin Huth (University of Vienna/Messerli Research Institute)

FRAMING MINORITY MINDS:
NORMALIZATION AND EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE

Abstract. Drawing from G. Canguilhem and B. Waldenfels, this presentation aims to analyze how institutions frame and, by the same token, normalize so-called minority minds. Institutions are conceived of as representing "neurotypical" agents and their perspective on normality, but also on specific conditions. Such a perspective is concretized in frames, which – following Butler – are constituted through language, policies, institutional structures and spatial arrangements, all of which (pre-)determine ways of how to respond to and support people with specific conditions.

Basically, such frames are meant to operate as basis to include and be responsive to people with particular conditions. However, precisely as they are generalizing and, thus, normalizing, they run the risk to establish or reinforce epistemic injustice in several respects, even though they might be well-intentioned and seek to avoid stigmatization and experienced shame. First, what – or who – exceeds those fames is not recognizable as minority mind in the "proper sense"; this leads to hermeneutical injustice as relevant concepts for experiences and requirements are absent. Second, individual specificities and needs of those recognized as being included in the category of minority minds are often hardly recognizable within such generalizations (as the pertinent conditions are normalized). Third, some individuals may lack an adequate speaker position within an institutional space to make themselves heard (as these spaces are configured according to typical versions of minority minds), which entails what Fricker calls testimonial injustice.

Rhona J. Flynn (University of Vienna/Messerli Research Institute)

WHO GETS TO LEARN? WHO GETS TO KNOW?
MINORITY MINDS AND THE UNIVERSITY

Abstract. Rhona will speak in two ten-minute sections, with group discussion after each.

In the first section, they will talk about their experience of using and developing university supports for cognitively disabled students (students with conditions such as autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia, and ADHD) and how these supports identify and target the problems faced by cognitively disabled and mentally ill students in the existing university system. They will highlight the arbitrariness of access to adequate supports – and therefore, the arbitrariness of access to education – faced by students, depending on the university they attend.

In the second section, Rhona will discuss the possibilities around third-level education for students with conditions which impact more profoundly on cognition, language, and memory (such as Downs syndrome, some forms of autism, brain injury, and conditions classified as intellectual disabilities). What would be required of universities to support access and participation for these students? Should universities even consider such access and participation? This connects the panel debate with wider questions about the purpose of universities at the social, cultural, and political levels: Who gets to learn? Who gets to produce knowledge? What is the university for?

Friday October 7

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Mari Mikkola (University of Amsterdam)

ENGINEERING IDEOLOGICALLY DEFECTIVE CONCEPTS

Abstract. One major motivation for conceptual engineering is that some ways in which we think and talk about reality are defective. Mona Simion, however, argues that it is permissible to engineer non-defective concepts too even when they are good enough. Still, Simion holds that there needs to be normative constraints on when this is legitimate: Engineering mustn't come with an epistemic loss. I don't dispute that we can have reasons to engage in continual conceptual maintenance. But some conceptual resources should be fixed because of serious defects involved: ones I term 'ideologically defective concepts.' Contra Simion, it isn't possible to engineer such concepts without an epistemic loss and this is the normative ground to engineer. I am not alone in thinking so. Paul-Mikhail Catapang Podosky argues for an expanded version of Simion's view precisely since Simion's constraint would make engineering ideologically defective concepts impermissible. Podosky, I contend, is right about ways in which Simion's normative constraint falls short. However, I argue, his expanded version also falls short: Podosky's understanding of how ideological concepts work is not apt to spell out what it means for conceptual defects to hinge on ideology. Here I advance an alternative diagnosis of such defectiveness. My analysis suggests that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to re-engineer ideological concepts. But the engineer can still engage in *de novo* engineering together with conceptual ethics. This makes conceptual engineering of ideological concepts much trickier than Simion and Podosky's views suggest. But ethics is hard and conceptual ethics is no exception.

FEATURING PRESENTATIONS

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Aleksandra Knezevic (University of Belgrade)

SOCIALLY ENGAGED PHILOSOPHY IS BIASED BUT NOT IN A BAD WAY: A REPLY TO VAN DER VOSSEN

Abstract. van der Vossen argues that political activism (i.e., "being a member of a political party, campaigning during elections" etc.) biases philosophers' thinking, making them worse at seeking the truth. Consequently, he states that the ideal of a socially engaged philosopher introduced by Plato and Marx should be replaced by an ideal of a philosopher as a disinterested seeker of the truth. For this reason, he holds that universities should resemble ivory towers more than they do now.

I understand van der Vossen's argument as follows: if philosophy aims to produce knowledge that benefits society (as the proponents of the ideal of a socially engaged philosopher assume, and it is warranted to suppose that van der Vossen grants this assumption), philosophy should produce unbiased knowledge. Further, if philosophy aims to produce unbiased knowledge, philosophers should be disinterested in their exploration of the truth, and not politically active (for the reason mentioned); thus, hidden in their ivory towers.

Against van der Vossen, I first argue that socially beneficial knowledge does not require disinterestedness and unbiasedness (these are, after all, not human traits) but the ability to distance oneself from one's biases so one can revise them in face of criticism. Consequently, although I admit that political activism

can strengthen one's biases, I argue that it does not follow that politically active philosophers are more likely to produce biased philosophy than those who are not interested in politics. Finally, I claim that a socially engaged philosopher does not need to be a political activist at all. A socially engaged philosopher is one who produces answers to questions that matter to society. However, to get to know what these questions are, a socially engaged philosopher must climb down the ivory tower and engage with the social context of her research but without the need to engage in political activism.

Paul Giladi (Manchester Metropolitan University)

THE PHILOSOPHER AS A 'PHENOMENOLOGICALLY ORIENTED SOCIOLOGIST': TAKING STOCK OF THINGS AND/AS INTELLECTUAL ACTIVISM

Abstract. In the ordinary sense of the expression, to 'take stock of things' has connotations of withdrawing from embedded socio-political and cultural-historical contexts for the purpose of isolated philosophical contemplation. However, in the face of the multiple intersecting crises brought about by the Anthropocene and the wave of increasingly reactionary political discourse and *praxes* in recent years, it would seem that any second-order philosophic discourse that construes *reflective thinking* as involving a retreat from the social world amounts to a dereliction of discursive and moral duty that is deeply injurious to two interrelated matters: 1) the effort to "lend a voice to suffering" à la Theodor Adorno; and 2) the capacity of philosophy *itself* to function as socially ameliorative.

In this paper, I aim to 're-signify' (in John Dewey's sense of the term) the idea of *taking stock*, to constructively align this reflective activity with the metaphilosophical contention of Max Horkheimer that the critical social theorist is a *phenomenologically oriented sociologist*. Agency as embodied and socio-historically embedded subjectivity is bound up with the practice of confronting contemporary social reality head-on: one is, by default, baptised as embodied and embedded in various social environments structured by power relations, and norms of material production, gender, race, sexuality, class, and (dis)ability. This means that theory and academic conversations cannot be – let alone afford to be – viewed as 'buttoned-up, white-chokered and clean-shaven', to play on William James's critique of apriorist rationalism.

I offer a technical account of *taking stock*, which avoids any construal of this intellectual activity as contemplative act of noetic topography. To take stock of things, I contend, is to have one's philosophical concepts rooted all-the-way-through and entangled in the experiential realities of multiple social groups subject to forms of material and symbolic oppression.

Yorgos Karagiannopoulos (University of Amsterdam)

TAILORING METAPHYSICS TO THE NEEDS OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Abstract. Emancipation and social movements are strongly intertwined. The latter fight for the realization of the former while the former needs the latter for its actualization. In the fight for emancipation, social movements must solve an epistemic issue: they must gather the relevant knowledge of the social world and its mechanics so they can learn how to change it. From Lukacs to modern standpoint theorists, the epistemic issue (along with its normative implications) was the main gain philosophy could have from the social movements. Yet, we have still much to learn from them. I argue that, in their struggle for emancipation, social movements track the metaphysical issue of "change through persistence". Consider the radical imaginary of a classless, raceless, genderless and stateless society. Subordinated, gendered and racialized workers do not exist in this utopia. People are emancipated from all the historically constructed structures of domination. Now, notice that the current dystopic society has changed to a utopian one. However, some things remain the same: Humans still work, have a skin color, express mostly

biological dimorphism and are socially organized. While all these things are partly the reason why there is exploitation and oppression in current societies, in the utopia they cease to be. That is because social movements changed the nature of these facts by changing the social structures. Some metaphysicians who adhere to the Parmenidean thesis that metaphysical change is impossible, find this position weird. I argue against the correctness and usefulness of their position especially in its application to issues of social metaphysics. By contrast, I think that we should incorporate the need for emancipation into our metaphysical frameworks – alongside the metaphysical modifications it implies – so we can contribute to the fight against social injustice.