Roman Altshuler (Stony Brook), “Character, Will, and Agency”

Abstract: Character and the will are rarely discussed together. At most, philosophers working on the one mention the other in an eliminativist vein—if character is represented as something chosen, for example, it can be chalked up to the work of the will; if the will consists merely of a certain arrangement of mental states, it can be seen as little more than a manifestation of character. This mutual neglect appears perfectly justified. If both character and will are determinants of action, to treat them separately would be to overdetermine agency at best, and at worst to fragment it. While defending this reasoning, I argue that things are not so simple, because character and will serve distinct explanatory and normative functions, respectively. The difference in function, however, does not prove that character and will must be ontologically distinct sources of agency; only that our discourse about them must keep them apart.

— Commentator: Mavis Biss (Loyola)

Marcus Arvan (U of Tampa), “Groundwork for a New Moral Epistemology: What Personality Research May Be Able to do for Moral and Political Philosophy”

Abstract: This paper argues that empirical research on personality traits and behavioral dispositions suggests a new kind of moral virtue epistemology in moral and political philosophy – an epistemology which would have us epistemically evaluate normative moral and political judgments on the basis of those judgments’ observed relationships to morally admirable and morally repugnant personality traits and behavior. The basic idea is that if particular moral or political judgments are found to be related to morally bad personality traits and behavior, then we should reject those judgments in favor of moral and political judgments found to correlate with morally good personality traits and behavior. I utilize some recent research on three dark and antisocial personality traits (the “Dark Triad” of Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and Psychopathy), as well as proposed research on overt misconduct, to lay some groundwork for future research based on this new epistemological proposal.

— Commentator: Trent Dougherty (Baylor)

Sara Bernstein (Duke), “Omissions, morality, and possibility”

Abstract: What is an omission? Suppose that an airplane technician eats lunch rather than perform a safety check, and the airplane crashes due to a malfunction. Intuitively, the technician’s failure to check the plane causes the plane to crash. Exactly what is the failure to check the plane?

Omissions are metaphysically puzzling. On the one hand, they seem to be nothing: they are events that do not occur. On the other hand, we intuitively reify omissions, grant them causal efficacy, and give them a role in moral judgments.

I present and defend the view that omissions are unactualized possibilities, and then show how the view accounts for several pieces of moral data. I also show how the view provides a new inroad into understanding Peter Singer’s argument for giving to charity.

— Commentator: Carolina Sartorio (Arizona)

Gwen Bradford (Rice), “Problems for perfectionism”

Abstract: I defend perfectionism – the view that developing the human essence is good – against some recent formulations of classic objections. The first objection is that that perfectionism counterintuitively undervalues the relevance of (1) pleasure and (2) preferences. The second objection is a sophisticated version of the “wrong properties” objection, wherein the intuitively plausible of the perfectionist ideal is threatened by a lack of theoretical pressure to accept putative wrong properties cases. I argue this objection is unsuccessful because it fails to distinguish between general claims and substantive views. However, when pushed further, the objection leads to a serious worry, what I call the Deep Problem: Perfectionism fails to offer a satisfying foundational justification for why developing the human essence is valuable.
The lack of immediate intuitions directed toward the general perfectionist claim place a special burden on perfectionism to provide a justificatory foundation, in contrast to other competing axiologies.

— Commentator: Stephanie Shiver (Utah)

Tim Campbell (Rutgers), “Infinite utility and Cain’s paradox: How personal identity complicates the quantification problem”

Abstract: James Cain has presented an intriguing paradox involving infinite utility. He has shown that if two distributions, A and B, each contain an infinite amount of utility, as well as the same persons and times, then A may contain more utility than B at each time even if A is worse than B (with respect to utility) for each person. Peter Vallentyne has claimed that the spirit of traditional utilitarianism favors B over A and has proposed a person-centered Pareto principle for ranking infinite distributions that entails that entails this result. I argue that given plausible assumptions about a person’s identity over time, Cain’s paradox can arise in special cases that involve merely finite quantities of utility, and that some of these cases constitute powerful counterexamples to Vallentyne’s Pareto principle and its alleged compatibility with traditional utilitarian ideals.

— Commentator: Melinda Roberts (College of New Jersey)

Tom Carson (Loyola-Chicago), “President Lincoln: Slavery, Utilitarianism, and Moral Luck”

Abstract: In 1861 Lincoln overruled Fremont’s order for partial emancipation in Missouri. The Emancipation Proclamation didn’t free slaves in the border states or Tennessee. Lincoln did not support the complete abolition of slavery until 1864. Although these policies were prima facie very wrong, they were morally justified because they were necessary to win the Civil War. Lincoln was a utilitarian and his policies in question can be justified on both utilitarian and non-utilitarian grounds. Lincoln and the Union had just cause for fighting the Civil War, even at the beginning of the war when emancipation was not a war aim. Lincoln enjoyed good moral luck in that his policies turned out well. However, he was justified in thinking that they would turn out for the best, even though almost no one (including Lincoln) accurately predicted the outcome of the war.

— Commentator: Nolan Hatley (University of Tennessee-Knoxville)

Randolph Clarke (Florida State), “Freely omitting to act”

Abstract: We take it for granted that commonly we act freely and we’re generally morally responsible for what we do when we so act. Can there be such a thing as freely omitting to act, or freely refraining or forbearing, and can we be similarly responsible for omitting, refraining, and forbearing? I’ll advance affirmative answers and suggest how we might understand our freedom and responsibility in such cases.

— Commentator: Darren Domsky (Texas A&M Galveston)

Christian Coons (Bowling Green), “If the shoe fits, what kind of reason do I have to wear it?”

Abstract: I first argue that an attitude can be fitting and yet there is no reason to have it --call this thesis No Reasons (“NR”). I then ask whether NR is boon or threat to Fitting-Attitudes (“FA”) accounts of value. The good news: FA now avoids its famous Wrong Kind of Reasons problem. The bad news: FA now faces difficulty in accounting for value’s practical relevance.

After reflecting value’s conceptual role, I suggest an FA account would most faithfully secure value’s practical relevance—but not one entailing reasons to feel as fit—but reasons to do what the fully-informed and rational would do in virtue of feeling as it fit. On this picture, fitting-attitudes are the conative attitudes of ideal practical deliberation—attitudes that fix what we ought or have reason to do. Valuable objects then, are the objects of these ideal conative attitudes. Along the way, I explain why defensible deontic theories require such conative ideals.

— Commentator: Alastair Norcross (University of Colorado)

Eva Dadlez (Central Oklahoma), “Fetal sentience and legislation”

Abstract: Over the past two years, several states have proposed, and almost as many have passed, something referred to as the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act, a piece of legislation that
makes abortion impermissible once fetal pain is possible and that further stipulates the fetus can feel pain at or before 20 weeks of gestation. We will investigate whether the claim of fetal pain perception at or before 20 weeks is true, and how such a claim is to be substantiated. Next, we will inquire whether the fetal capacity to experience pain, at whatever stage of development, reflects on the morality of abortion, and whether it should be at all relevant to determining its legality. Finally, we would like to explore the implications that a commitment to a pain-related or sentience criterion of rights might have for a pro-life agenda.

— Commentator: Christopher Lean (Utah)

Jorah Dannenberg (Stanford), “Promising, practices, and interpersonal obligation”

Abstract: Social practice-based accounts of promising explain the obligation of a promise by appeal to facts about the entire community in which it is made. Scanlon and others have suggested that such accounts cannot explain the distinctively interpersonal character of the way a promise binds. I argue that this objection is rooted in a conception of the rules of our practice of promising that is unduly impoverished: it assumes our practice’s rules must be specifiable in entirely non-moral terms. But a richer conception that makes use of moral terms in understanding the rules by which practitioners relate to one another was central to the social-practice view from its inception – it is suggested by Hume’s account of fidelity as an artificial virtue. I argue that this richer conception better characterizes our actual practice of promising, and shows how that practice leads to distinctively interpersonal obligations between promisors and their promisees.

— Commentator: Moti Gorin (Rice)

Michael Deem (Notre Dame), “Dehorning the Darwinian dilemma for realist theories of value”

Abstract: My aim in this paper is to critically examine Sharon Street’s ‘Darwinian dilemma’ for normative realism (DD). I challenge Street’s claim that the normative realist cannot adequately accommodate the hypothesis that evolutionary forces have had a tremendous effect on our evaluative experience. I begin by pointing out a number of scientifically implausible commitments DD requires and proposing plausible alternatives that avoid the problems that beset Street’s own adaptive link account. I then turn to the task of constructing an outline for an evolutionary behavioral theory that the realist can utilize to explain the connection between evolutionary forces and the independent normative facts he or she posits. The upshot is that it should become clear that DD does not pose a threat to normative realism and that evolutionary-behavioral theory underdetermines the choice between realism and antirealism in metaethics.

— Commentator: Justin Horn (Wisconsin-Madison)

Wiebke Deimling (Pennsylvania), “Kant’s Pragmatic Concept of Emotions”

Abstract: This paper argues that, although Kant does not have a term corresponding to our contemporary concept of emotions, he does provide a concept that is similar in scope. I call this concept Kant’s pragmatic concept of emotions because it is implicit in his project of an “anthropology from a pragmatic point of view”. This concept picks out all states that are of special interest to his anthropological project and cuts across different concepts of particular types of affective states that he distinguishes. Kant gives an empirical account of these states. But empirical psychology in his anthropology is always subservient to his account of the right attitude we should take towards our affective states and the role they should play in moral motivation. The paper shows that Kant takes a treatment of what we would now call our emotional life to be important for his theory of virtue and moral life.

— Commentator: Robert Shanklin (Santa Clara University)

Dan Demetriou (Minnesota-Morris), “Realism and fundamental disagreement: The case of honor reconsidered”

Abstract: John Doris and Alexandra Plakias (2008) use the Nisbett-Cohen (1996) account of honor to suggest that honor-based norms fundamentally disagree with Western liberal ones. The divide between Western liberals and Southern honor-adherents is an important piece of evidence in their empirical case for moral antirealism. In this essay,
I point out some empirical inadequacies with the Nisbett-Cohen account. These are noteworthy points in themselves, considering the Nisbett-Cohen account’s influence on empirically-informed philosophers. Furthermore, I suggest another account of honor that actually strengthens Doris and Plakias’ case for fundamental moral disagreement. Nonetheless, I argue that the persistent appeal of the honor ethos isn’t best explained by antirealism, but pluralism—a “diffusing explanation” on behalf of realism that itself has considerable empirical support.

— Commentator: Peter Nichols (Wisconsin-Madison)

Cristian Dimitriu (University of Kansas), “Odious debts and global justice”

Abstract: I explain the conditions that need to exist in order for a debt to be binding. I do this by clarifying the notion of “Odious Debts”. The moral question that lies at the heart of the concept of odious debts is the following: If a despotic or corrupt leader uses loan money to repress his people, maintain himself in power, buy personal luxuries or any other illegitimate act; then why should citizens and their future generations bear the burden to repay what are basically the personal debts of their former captor? In order to answer this question, I connect the problem of odious debts with theories of social contract, and argue that the reason why certain debts are not binding in the first place is that they do not satisfy the conditions that generated collective responsibility (that is, that made citizens be bound by the state). Among these conditions, an important one is that rulers cannot be said to be acting in the name of the people when they fail act in accordance with any minimal acceptable threshold of political action.

— Commentator: Gina Schouten (Wisconsin-Madison)

Dale Dorsey (Kansas), “How not to argue against consequentialism”

Abstract: In this paper, I argue that one class of objection to consequentialism is illegitimate. This class starts by noting that consequentialism requires agents to perform actions that, plausibly, agents lack decisive practical reasons to perform. But given that moral requirements are rationally decisive (i.e., one always has decisive practical reason to conform to moral requirements), consequentialism cannot adequately characterize the moral point of view. The demands of consequentialism fail to maintain the connection to practical rationality enjoyed by moral demands. Call this critique—which itself takes many forms—the “objection from moral rationalism”. One obvious way to oppose this critique is to argue that moral rationalism is false. This is not my strategy; I will not object to the objection from moral rationalism on the grounds that its central premise is misguided. Rather, I leave open the possibility that a persuasive argument for the rational decisiveness of moral demands can and will be found. My claim is different. I claim that objections from moral rationalism are either internally inconsistent or they rely on a prior rejection of consequentialism (and are hence either moot or beg the question). Either way, objections from moral rationalism—which include the classic demandingness and integrity objections—should simply be discarded.

— Commentator: Justin Moss (Avila University)

Michael Ducey (University of Cincinnati), “Ethical surrogacy in the face of noncompliance”

Abstract: This paper addresses the issue of a Kantian agent maintaining ethical integrity given the presence of agents that aren’t following the rules. Sometimes, when others don’t behave in a moral way, those remaining consistent to their ethical principles suffer. Tamar Schapiro has argued that actions normally considered wrong under a Kantian framework can be “surrogated” for moral choices in order to thwart the harm from noncomplying agents. I argue that Schapiro’s surrogacy requires the existence of an independent standard by which the surrogated action can be seen as the morally preferable option to the Kantian. The required existence of the independent standard undermines the idea of Kantianism as an objective moral theory. Objective theories cannot remain objective while acknowledging the correctness of another standard when it comes to handling difficult moral predicaments. Thus, Schapiro’s method of surrogacy
cannot work if we want Kantianism to exist in its current form.

— Commentator: Tony Smith (St. Cloud Technical College)

Kyla Ebels-Duggan (Northwestern), “Dealing with the past: Responsibility and Personal History”

Abstract: We are dependent on others for our moral formation, and need others’ help if we are to develop well. Many people think that, if we lack this help during our formative years, we cannot be held responsible or blamed for things that we do in adulthood. I reject this position, and argue that unfortunate formative circumstances do not undermine the warrant for either responsibility or blame. I then diagnose the tendency to think that formative circumstances do matter in this way, arguing that knowledge of these circumstances can play an essential epistemic role in our interpersonal interactions.

— Commentator: Adam R. Thomson (University of Nebraska-Lincoln)

Mylan Engel (NIU), “Do Animals Have Rights, and Does it Matter if They Don’t?”

Abstract: I develop and defend a conditional proof that animals have negative moral rights including the right to life, the right to bodily integrity, the right not to be tortured, and the right not to be harmed. I argue that most people are rationally committed to the view that animals have such negative rights, on pain of inconsistency. I then consider what duties we have to animals, if the condition on which I predicate my conditional proof of animal rights fails to obtain. I conclude that even if animals don’t have rights, we still have stringent duties not to harm or kill them.

— Commentator: Matthew Kopec (Wisconsin-Madison)

Wenwen Fan (University of Missouri-Columbia), “Second-Personal Reasons and Moral Obligation”

Abstract: Stephan Darwall (2006, 2010) claims that a conceptual connection exists between moral obligation and what he calls ‘second-personal reasons.’ In particular, he (2006) claims that, “moral obligation is an irreducibly second-personal concept. That an action would violate a moral obligation is...a second-personal reason not to do it.” A second-personal reason, according to him (2006), is “a distinctive kind of (normative) reason for acting,” a reason made on one’s will and purportedly given by an authority’s demand or address.

This paper argues that Darwall fails to establish the above conceptual connection between second-personal reasons and moral obligation. The implication is that Darwall has to modify his account, accepting either the idea that his account is incompatible with the concept of impersonal moral obligation or the idea that second-personal reasons at best account for only interpersonal morality.

— Commentator: Robyn Gaier (Viterbo)

David Faraci (Bowling Green State University / Virginia Tech), “Enemy of My Enemy: Nihilism and the Case for Cognitivism”

Abstract: If all goes well when we deliberate, our actions are informed by our normative attitudes, which are themselves informed by the normative truth. Yet according to expressivism, ultimately there is nothing to normativity beyond such attitudes. Thus, in an important sense, expressivism seems anti-objectivist. In this paper, I suggest that expressivism’s “negation problem” can be employed to make this intuitive, objectivity-based case against expressivism more powerful. Specifically, I argue that expressivists are likely unable to both solve the negation problem and make sense of a kind of commonplace nihilistic doubt that is a symptom of the objectivist nature of normative thought and language. I first argue, following Mark Schroeder’s discussion of the negation problem, that there is no plausible expressivist-friendly semantic interpretation of nihilistically motivated negated normative claims (e.g., “murdering is not wrong”). And, I maintain, the nature of normative thought and language ensures that an interpretation is required.

— Commentator: Martin Turner (Wash U)

Jeremy Garrett (Missouri-Kansas City), “Marriage, children, and the state”

Abstract: Increasingly, those seeking exclusive state support for “traditional marriage” have made the children’s well-being defense (CWD) their centerpiece argument. At first glance, this argument
looks remarkably straightforward and intuitively compelling — the state should only recognize and support as “marriages” those relationships composed of one man and one woman because children fare best within a traditional family structure. However, appearances are deceiving. Once all the implicit premises in this argument are unpacked and critically examined, CWD turns out to be neither straightforward nor particularly compelling. In this presentation, I offer a multi-faceted critique of CWD that challenges three important dimensions of the argument: (1) conceptual coherence, (2) empirical credibility, and (3) normative adequacy. Moreover, I argue that effectively promoting children’s well-being requires a more direct and less marriage-centric approach from the state. I conclude by describing some basic principles that should guide this approach.

— Commentator: Colin Hickey (Georgetown)

Carl Hammer (CUNY Baruch College), “Kant’s vegetarian imperative”

Abstract: Kant’s ethics is used by some as a defense of the exploitation of animals and is criticized by others for not sufficiently acknowledging the moral relevance of the plight of animals. These appeals overlook the broad applicability of Kant’s principles. In this paper, I argue that Kant’s ethics implies a duty to abstain from almost all meat and some other animal products derived from farming. I argue that there is a Kantian principle not to choose goods that have been derived from vice, with certain qualifications. Since animal farming as we know it in our society almost universally involves vice according to Kant’s ethics, we have a Kantian duty to abstain from its products.

— Commentator: Trevor Hedberg (University of Tennessee-Knoxville)

Jason Hanna (NIU), “Doing, allowing, and the relevance of the past”

Abstract: Most deontologists claim that it is more objectionable to do harm than it is to allow harm of comparable magnitude. I argue that this view faces a largely neglected puzzle regarding the moral relevance of an agent’s past behavior. Consider an agent who chooses to save five people rather than one, where the one person’s life is in jeopardy because of something the agent did earlier. How are the agent’s obligations affected by the fact that his now letting the one die would retroactively make it the case that he has killed? I argue that the most promising deontological response to this question is difficult to defend. Further, even if it could be defended, it would not resolve a further set of cases, in which commonsense intuition indicates that an agent is required to terminate a threat she initiated more recently in preference to a threat she initiated less recently.

— Commentator: Molly Gardner (Wisconsin-Madison)

Edward Harcourt (Oxford), “The theory of approval and disapproval”

Abstract: In a well-known series of papers, David Velleman has attempted to effect a ‘marriage of Freud and Kant’ — that is, to make room for our close personal ties in a realistic account of the development of rational agency. Like Freud’s, Velleman’s account relies on the idea of internalized others, but this feature of it lays the account open to an objection: if internalized others really are others, then their presence is incompatible with the phenomenon they are introduced to explain, namely the developed subject’s autonomy. Focusing on the role of parental approval and disapproval in the development of self-regulation, the present paper attempts to make use of some ideas from attachment theory in such a way as to circumvent this objection.

— Commentator: Henry Pickford (University of Colorado)

Paul Kelleher (Wisconsin-Madison), “Aggregation, relevance, and intransitivity”

Abstract: Consequentialists embrace thoroughgoing aggregation; most non-consequentialists do not. I defend a non-consequentialist alternative to thoroughgoing aggregation that employs Kamm’s and Scanlon’s notion of an irrelevant good. I first aim to rebut an objection to the idea of relevance that Alastair Norcross has pressed in the literature. I then address two further objections that I find more threatening (one by Broome, one by Norcross). These objections purport to identify real-world examples in which ostensibly irrelevant goods are aggregated to outweigh much larger goods in ways
that trouble few non-consequentialists. In response, I suggest that these may not be genuine examples of aggregation at all, but rather cases in which the promotion of very minor goods is permissible because society is already sufficiently committed to promoting larger and more important goods.

— Commentator: Justin Klocksiem (University of Alabama-Tuscaloosa)

David Killoren (Coastal Carolina University), “Non-naturalist moral perception”

Abstract: According to the causal constraint on perception, in order for S to perceive that P, there must be causal contact between S and P. According to standard moral non-naturalism, moral facts are causally inert. So, it seems, moral non-naturalism is incompatible with the hypothesis that moral facts are perceivable. Some have attempted to defend non-naturalist moral perception by attacking the causal constraint, and by arguing that the causal constraint should be replaced by the reliability constraint, which requires only that perception be generated by a reliable mechanism. I argue that a reliability-based defense of the possibility of non-naturalist moral perception fails, but that an alternative defense can succeed. In §1 and §2, I attack the reliability constraint. Then, in §3, I attack the causal constraint. Finally, in §4, I argue for a different constraint on perception: the explanatory relatedness constraint. This constraint makes room for non-naturalist moral perception.

— Commentator: Daniel Crow (Wisconsin-Madison)

Charlie Kurth (Washington-St. Louis), “On moral motivation: Internalism, externalism, or spoils to the victor?”

Abstract: Our understanding of moral judgment and its relation to motivation builds from deep, but competing, internalist and externalist intuitions. Despite the entrenched nature of these rival intuitions, most participants in debates about moral motivation believe that a more careful examination of them will reveal whether internalism or externalism is more plausible. That is a mistake. I show that this standard approach stalls because it focuses on too narrow a set of intuitions. I then argue that progress is possible if we look more systematically at the role that moral judgment plays in a broad range of metaethical phenomena. Not only does this alternative approach help advance debates about moral motivation, but it also has implications for metaethics more generally.

— Commentator: Caroline Arruda (UTEP)

Jonathan Lang (Wisconsin-Madison), “Imperative logic and explicit performatives: The failure of the grammaticality principle and compositionality principle”

Abstract: An orthodox principle of compositionality for imperatives is as follows: If some sentential component x of a sentence S (constructed from the standard logical connectives) is an imperative (i.e., expresses a prescription), then S is also an imperative. A widely endorsed grammatical constraint on the construction of complex imperative sentences is as follows: Imperative sentences cannot grammatically be embedded in conditional subordinator ‘if’ or ‘only if’ clauses. In this paper, I show that the compositionality principle and the grammatical constraint are both false. More specifically, I show that explicit performatives are capable of flouting the compositionality principle precisely because such sentences are the only imperatives that can disobey the above grammatical constraint. I end by briefly discussing some semantic considerations concerning explicit performatives.

— Commentator: Mark van Roojen (University of Nebraska Lincoln)

Hallie Liberto (Connecticut), “Contextualizing Exploitation”

Abstract: Mikhail Valdman has recently argued that wrongful exploitation is the extraction of excessive benefits from someone who cannot reasonably refuse one’s offer. I start this paper by describing Valdman’s argument from the best explanation for his account of exploitation, an argument that reveals problems with a variety of popular alternative accounts, including those of Allen Wood, Ruth Sample, and Alan Wertheimer. I then defend Alan Wertheimer against Valdman by suggesting that wrongful exploitation can occur even in some circumstances in which the person we exploit is in a position whereby he can reasonably refuse our offer.
Next, I describe a certain type of context within which extracting excessive benefits from someone who cannot refuse our offer is not wrong. Finally, I suggest that this last critique also poses problems for competing accounts of wrongful exploitation, including Wood’s and Wertheimer’s, revealing a need for a new or modified theory of exploitation.

— Commentator: John Harris (TCU)

Matt Lutz (USC), “The ‘now what’ problem for error theory”

Abstract: Error theorists hold that, although our first-order moral thought and discourse commits us to the existence of moral truths, there are no such truths. Holding this position in metaethics puts the error theorist in an uncomfortable position regarding first-order morality. When it comes to our pre-theoretic moral commitments, what should the error theorist think? What should she say? What should she do? I call this the ‘Now What’ Problem for Error Theory.

This paper suggests a framework for evaluating different approaches to the ‘Now What’ Problem, and goes on to evaluate the three most common responses to this problem. All three are found to have noteworthy problems. Finally, I present my own solution, and argue that it presents the most appealing solution to the ‘Now What’ Problem.

— Commentator: Mike Huemer (University of Colorado)

Adrienne Martin (Pennsylvania), “Gratitude, Disappointment, and Normative Hope”

Abstract: I want to examine the way we sometimes place hope in people, and argue that it is a distinctive and fundamental way of relating to people interpersonally. I aim to fill two gaps in the philosophical literature. First, recent philosophical literature on hope—which is fairly small, to begin with—focuses on our hopes for particular outcomes to unfold in the world rather than hopes that are essentially interpersonal. What I will call normative hope has not been previously identified. Second, the existing literature on interpersonal relations focuses on holding people responsible and, I will argue, normatively hoping for a person to live up to some principle of behavior is a way of aspiring on her behalf, which is closely related to but different from holding her responsible for her behavior.

— Commentator: Emily McRae (University of Oklahoma)

Patricia McShane (Georgetown), “A Kantian Defense of Self-deception”

Abstract: In this paper I explore the moral dimensions of self-deception from a Kantian perspective. On the assumption that there is such a thing as self-deception I argue that, sometimes, self-deception helps us to promote our own ends without corroding social trust and the foundations of human community. My view is Kantian in spirit, although not in letter; what I argue is clearly contrary to what Kant writes, however, I believe we can make sense of the permissibility of self-deception within a Kantian framework.

— Commentator: Zac Cogley (Northern Michigan)

Chris Melenovsky (U Penn), “The practice-dependent (yet personal) wrong of breaking promises”

Abstract: In Rawls’s analysis, the wrong of breaking a promise is practice-dependent; it is wrong to break a promise because the principle of fairness obligates us to follow the rules of a social practice of promise-keeping. T.M. Scanlon and others have criticized this explanation because it seems to present a broken promise as a wrong done to practice-participants generally rather than as a personal wrong done to the promisee specifically. In this paper, I defend the Rawlsian view against this objection by appeal to the legitimate expectations that arise from justified social practices. When a practice is sufficiently justified, participants not only have an obligation to follow the rules but legitimate expectations that others will follow those rules as well. As such, we can explain the personal wrong of breaking a promise as disrespecting the legitimate expectations of the promisee.

— Commentator: Nate Olson (Georgetown)

Garret Merriam (Southern Indiana), “Miscarriages of justice and the paradox of innocence: An experimental philosophy approach to the death penalty”

Abstract: As long as we have a death penalty we will inevitably execute innocent people. It has been argued by many, such as Radelet, Bedau and
Putnam, that such miscarriages of justice mean we should abolish the death penalty. I argue that, paradoxically, if we abolish the death penalty more innocent people will be punished for crimes they did not commit. Miscarriages of justice will increase because the ‘surplus oversight’ (extra appeals, more lawyer hours, etc.) that attend capital cases will disappear. I constructed and implemented an experiment to test this hypothesis and the results support my conclusion: if we abolish the death penalty we will pay less attention to wrongful convictions and hence inadvertently more people will spend the rest of their lives in prison for crimes they did not commit. Ironically, if we want to avoid miscarriages of justice, we have a reason to keep the death penalty.

— Commentator: Brian Talbot (University of Colorado)

Zachary Miller (Rutgers), “Strong versus weak deontic necessity: A semantic argument with metaethical implications”

Abstract: We can distinguish between two kinds of deontic necessity: strong deontic necessity, associated with have to and must, and weak deontic necessity, associated with ought to and should. I argue that our judgments concerning strong deontic necessity are corrupted by morally irrelevant factors. Judgments concerning weak deontic necessity, on the other hand, are not similarly affected. Strong deontic necessity should be avoided, as should related moral notions, such as the notions of duty and obligation. Weak deontic necessity should be used instead.

— Commentator: Nate Sharadin (University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill)

David Morrow (UAB), “Why act-consequentialism collapses into rule-consequentialism”

Abstract: It is sometimes thought that rule-consequentialism (RC) collapses into act-consequentialism (AC). In fact, the opposite is true: AC collapses into RC, making AC untenable. This paper presents a very abstract schema for consequentialist theories and explains AC and RC as specifications of that schema. It then presents two types of cases, described in game theoretic terms, in which AC fails to assign truth-values to many first-order normative claims unless it is supplemented in a way that transforms it into RC. That is, these are cases in which AC simply gives no answer, even in principle, to questions about what to do, but RC does give an answer. Therefore, would-be act-consequentialists must accept a “truth-gappy” form of AC, abandon consequentialism altogether, or adopt some form of RC. The paper briefly compares the kind(s) of RC that result from this argument with “traditional” RC.

— Commentator: Scott Forschler (St. Cloud Technical College)

Collin O’Neil (Center for Bioethics, NYU), “Placebo controls and the doctrine of double effect”

Abstract: There is presently a consensus that clinical researchers are justified in doing less than their best for the subjects in their trials when necessary to obtain results that will help future patients more. I criticize this view on the grounds that it neglects the constraint against allowing harm as a means, and describe several trial designs that intend the harmful consequences of withholding care as a means to various research-related ends. Consent is capable of canceling this kind of wrong, but the question of what conditions consent must meet to do so can only be answered by consulting the justification underlying the Doctrine of Double Effect. I offer an interpretation of one of the traditional rationales that implies that successful consent must not only be informed and voluntary, but also “cooperative,” a condition that is often unmet, but would be feasible to meet.

— Commentator: Anne Baril (University of New Mexico)


Abstract: Kant held that an agent’s conduct has moral worth only if it is done from duty, not merely in accordance with it. Critics find this emphasis on acting from duty objectionably alienating. I defend Kant by showing that his system allows that it is sometimes better to act from sympathetic inclination rather than duty. Kant recognizes that due to contingent facts about human nature, conduct motivated by duty alone is unlikely to
accomplish certain moral ends. Human beings, by nature, need to know that other people feel genuine sympathetic concern for them. Thus, fulfillment of our duty to promote the happiness of others requires that we sometimes help from sympathy rather than duty. Kant refers to the cultivation and utilization of sympathy as the duty of humanity. While actions performed from sympathetic inclination lack genuine moral worth, the ideal Kantian agent performs such actions with regularity.

— Commentator: Geraldine Ng (Reading)

Theron Pummer (UCSD), “Would division multiply desert?”

Abstract: It seems plausible that (i) how much punishment a person deserves cannot be affected by the mere existence or nonexistence of another person. We might have also thought that (ii) how much punishment is deserved cannot increase merely in virtue of personal division. I argue that (i) and (ii) are inconsistent with the popular belief that, other things being equal, when people culpably do very wrong acts, they ought to be punished for this, even if punishing them would benefit no one. Insofar as we cannot plausibly deny (i), we are forced to either abandon the popular belief in desert, or else allow that personal division could, as I put it, “multiply desert.” Division cases might, I suggest, lead us to rethink desert.

— Commentator: Jeff McMahan (Rutgers)

Travis Rieder (Georgetown), “How to Reduce Morality to Self-Interest: A Reply to the Fool”

Abstract: Those who intend to reduce morality to self-interest must respond to Hobbes’ Fool: if morality is really to be generated from particular agents’ interests, then how do we deal with those cases in which it seems clearly in one’s interest to act in paradigmatically immoral ways? A promising response is to argue indirectly, holding that it is in one’s interest to adopt, as a strategy, the rules of common sense morality.

In this paper, I accept this indirect argument for reductionism, with the goal of seeing whether, given the move from acts to strategies, we can in fact derive the desired judgments about particular, token acts. While it may seem obvious that if one

ought to be honest, then one ought not to lie in some particular case; however, Derek Parfit makes a powerful argument that this is not the case. I will here argue that the reductionist can, in fact, accept the desired judgments about particular acts, since we ought to act on the strategies we ought to adopt.

— Commentator: Eric Chwang (University of Colorado)

Mark Rosner (Queen’s University, Canada), “Defending the Rational Relations View”

Abstract: The rational relations view of moral responsibility holds that it is not the connection with choice that is the mark of responsible agency; rather it is the connection of an attitude or action with an agent’s evaluative capacities that determines when an agent is responsible. In this paper I defend the rational relations view of moral responsibility against three criticisms – first, that it cannot make good sense of our responsibility for practical irrationals such as akrasia; second, that it cannot account for responsibility in cases where our general capacities are defeated in the particular circumstances; and finally that it cannot account for our responsibility for what we notice and neglect, forget and omit. I distinguish a wide and narrow version of the rational relations view and in each case claim that the criticisms are convincing only on the narrow, but not on the wide, reading.

— Commentator: Danielle Wylie (Wisconsin-Madison)

Brook Sadler (South Florida), “Marriage: A matter of right or virtue? Kant and the contemporary debate”

Abstract: Is marriage fundamentally a public matter, subject to state sanction, or a private matter? Adopting Kant’s distinction between a doctrine of right, which addresses the external conduct of agents within the framework of civil society, and a doctrine of virtue, which addresses duties that cannot be publicly enforced, I argue that marriage properly falls under the doctrine of virtue. Thus, it is private in a very particular, ethically significant sense. I argue that Kant erred in placing marriage within the doctrine of right because of his limited view of sexuality. Once we correct for this view of sexuality, and marriage is re-positioned within the doctrine of virtue, we have the theoretical resources to see marriage as an ethically ideal relationship. This view
is consistent with both Kant’s larger ethical theory and contemporary marriage norms. The view of marriage I develop recommends disestablishing civil marriage, recognizes the moral equality of same-sex marriage, and displaces the public/private distinction as it typically appears in current debate.

— Commentator: Claudia Mills (University of Colorado)

Jeff Sebo (New York University), “The narrative theory of the self”

Abstract: Daniel Dennett, Owen Flanagan, and Marya Schechtman, and others argue for the narrative theory of the self, according to which the self is a narrative construct. But while the narrative theory is plausible in many respects, it also seems implausible in at least one respect: it seems to make facts about the self too subjective, i.e., too dependent on the content of a self-narrative. For example, the narrative theory seems to imply that you can become virtuous and praiseworthy simply by constructing a self-narrative according to which you are. In this paper, I reply to this objection by distinguishing two narrative constructs that narrative theorists tend to conflate: centers of narrative gravity, which are fully objective narrative constructs, and the protagonists of self-narratives, which are partly subjective/partly objective narrative constructs. I then argue that narrative theorists ought to say that the self is a center of narrative gravity instead of the protagonist of a self-narrative.

— Commentator: Brian Coffey (UC Davis)

Matthew Smith (Yale/Leeds), “Bootstrapping and the authority of intentions”

— Commentator: Iskra Fileva (UNC Chapel Hill)

Aaron Smuts (Rhode Island College), “A life worth living”

Abstract: Theories of well-being tell us what makes a life good for the one who lives it. But there is more to what makes a life worth living than just well-being. We care about the worth of our lives, and we are right to do so. I argue that a life worth living (LWL) should pass a pre-existence test—given a synoptic pre-view, a benevolent caretaker should allow one to be born rather than to never have been. A life worth avoiding (LWA) is one that a benevolent caretaker should disallow. I defend an objective list theory of the worth of a life: The most worthwhile lives are those high in various objective goods. These principally include welfare and meaning.

— Commentator: Teresa Burke (Gallaudet University)

Justin Snedegar (USC), “Contrastive reasons and promotion”

Abstract: A promising but underexplored view about the nature of normative reasons is contrastivism, which says that the reason relation includes an argument place for a set of alternative actions or attitudes, so that considerations are always reasons for one thing rather than another, or for one thing out of some set of alternatives. Contrastivism gains an advantage over non-contrastive theories by allow considerations to be a reason to A relative to one set of alternatives, without being a reason to A relative to another set. So reasons relative to different sets are independent of one another. But this very independence seems to raise a big problem: intuitively, there should be some relationships between reasons relative to certain kinds of sets. So we need to constrain this independence, but in just the right ways to avoid the problem but keep the advantages. I show that by appealing to the popular idea that reasons involve the promotion of objections (desires, goals, values), we can develop a version of contrastivism that delivers just the right relationships. Moreover, this idea actually provides independent support for contrastivism, since the best way to make sense of the relevant kind of promotion is on a contrastive framework.

— Commentator: Jason Raibley (Cal State – Long Beach)

Vojko Strahovnik and Matjaz Potrc (University of Ljubljana), “Phenomenological objectivity”

Abstract: Our aims involve the following: clarify the notion of moral phenomenology and especially the impact it could have on moral theory; interpret the discussion between moral cognitivism and non-cognitivism in the light of moral phenomenology; present the recent position of cognitive expressivism in the light of this debate; point out the key shortcomings of this theory, especially in respect to the purported objectivity of moral judgments. We conclude with the proposal about how to properly
understand the purported phenomenological objectivity and the consequences this would have for moral theory.

— Commentator: Kelly Heuer (Georgetown)

Jennifer Szende (Queen’s University, Canada), “Global Justice and the Problem of Perspective”

Abstract: This paper argues that a state-centered theory of global justice is bad for women, but that a cosmopolitan framing of global justice is better in this regard. Within a liberal domestic theory of justice, the public/private distinction has been repeatedly shown to be bad for women because it creates a domain for injustice that becomes invisible to public policy and the law. I argue that state-centered theories of global justice, especially those that draw on a robust account of sovereignty, create an analogous space that is cut off from questions of global justice, and for this reason, I suggest that this way of framing questions of global justice is bad, and is bad for women in particular. The concern I highlight in this paper is that the way the statist creates a space for justice can also result in the creation of a space for injustice.

— Commentator: Danielle Wenner (Cleveland Clinic)

Mikhail Valdman (Virginia Commonwealth), “Autonomy: Incoherent or unimportant?”

Abstract: We seem capable of self-government, of controlling and shaping our lives. This also seems to be something that matters, especially with regard to how we should be treated. Theories of personal autonomy attempt to explain this, but no such theory, I’ll argue, is likely to succeed; none is likely to deliver a coherent account of what self-government involves without undermining the case for its mattering. Autonomy theorists, I’ll argue, face a potentially intractable dilemma – one that stems from a choice they must make when considering an agent’s role in the process that confers autonomy upon her desires. An agent’s being autonomous either requires her active involvement in this process or it does not. If it does, then being autonomous will require that agents govern the very desires that must govern them, which is incoherent. If it doesn’t, we’d be left with a conception of autonomy that lacks a clear normative role.

— Commentator: Tait Szabo (University of Wisconsin-Washington County)

Elijah Weber (Bowling Green), “What’s so great about moral responsibility?: A critique of narrative value”

Abstract: Many prominent compatibilists about moral responsibility and determinism, including John Martin Fischer, Gary Watson, and Susan Wolf, argue that moral responsibility is an important, even value-adding feature of our lives. This value, it is claimed, stems from the self-expressive qualities of morally responsible actions and is best described as a kind of narrative value. I argue that this explanation is problematic, in light of the relationship between actions for which we are morally responsible, and self-expressive actions. While morally responsible action is self-expressive, some self-expression occurs in the absence of moral responsibility. Thus, it is not just in virtue of being self-expressive that morally responsible action is a value-adding feature of our lives. Compatibilists must say more about the relationship between moral responsibility and narrative value. Unfortunately, nothing they have said thus far explains why it is morally responsible action, and not merely self-expressive action, which makes our lives valuable.

— Commentator: Zachary Goldberg (Arizona State University)

Justin Weinberg (South Carolina), “Why we are wrong about dependency”

Abstract: A poor person may depend on a government agency for income. A disabled person may depend on a certain kind of technology, like a hearing aid, to interact with others. An elderly person may depend upon other people for transportation. Though these paradigmatically dependent persons are dependent in different ways, that they are dependent is often taken as a way in which they are badly off; it is common to think that being dependent is bad. In this paper, I argue that this view is false. I argue that on the most reasonable conception of dependency, we are all dependent. I then argue that various grounds for objecting to dependency, including appeals to independence,
achievement, quantity of dependence, autonomy, function, cost, and social stigma, all fail. I then briefly discuss the real-world implications of seeing dependency positively.

— Commentator: Ben Sachs (NYU)

Rivka Weinberg (Scripps), “Procreation, paternalism, and consent”

Abstract: Paternalism is a concept derived from parental norms yet procreation – arguably, the archetypal paternalistic act - is rarely analyzed as such for a variety of factors which, I argue, are easily overcome. As paternalists, we can look to the child’s hypothetical consent (or lack thereof) to guide our procreativity. But Shiffrin argues that life’s risks are only permissible to impose if one obtains the imposee’s actual consent. She argues that procreation is always morally problematic because it violates the consent rights of future persons. But children don’t have autonomy or consent rights. Although children mature and procreation has lifelong effects, many decisions we legitimately make for our children have lifelong effects. I conclude that just as paternalists can rely on hypothetical consent in other cases, they can do so in the procreative case. Paternalism is a promising guide to procreativity; it seems likely to permit/restrict procreation in commonsensical ways consistent with child welfare.

— Commentator: Doran Smolkin (Kwantlen Polytechnic)

Erik Wielenberg (DePauw University), “Three ways the moral can supervene”

Abstract: It is widely believed that if moral properties are instantiated, they are supervenient properties. But why do moral properties supervene upon whichever properties they supervene upon? I’ll distinguish three ways the moral can supervene and argue that the existence of these different ways that the moral can supervene has important implications for a number of contemporary meta-ethical debates. Specifically, I’ll argue that recognizing these three ways the moral can supervene (i) sheds light on some contemporary arguments about the divine command theory, (ii) helps robust normative realists answer Jackson-style supervenience arguments against their view, and (iii) exposes important weaknesses in Christian Coons’s recent purported proof of moral realism.

— Commentator: Howard Nye (University of Alberta)

Jack Woods and Derek Baker (Princeton), “Inconsistent attitudes and inconsistent contents: A defense of b-type inconsistency”

Abstract: There are many common cases of inconsistency in attitude which cannot be explained in terms of the inconsistency of the contents of these attitudes. Such cases derail Mark Schroeder’s prima facie compelling objection that inconsistency of attitude irreducible to inconsistency of content (B-type inconsistency) is mysterious and unexplained. We believe that Schroeder is not right to reject B-type inconsistency and that the alternatives to B-type inconsistency require assumptions no less mysterious and no better explained than the assumption that some attitudes are B-type inconsistent. We thus believe that the expressivist should and can defend the existence of and theoretical acceptability of B-type inconsistency. The familiar and intelligible cases of B-type inconsistency–inconsistent preferences, credences, evaluative states like ‘like’ and ‘love’, and more typically moral attitudes like approval and toleration–legitimate B-type inconsistency as a familiar bit of ideology available for the development of an expressivist account of normative language.

— Commentator: Julia Staffel (University of Southern California)