The Philosophy of Penelope Mackie: A Memorial Conference

Paper Abstracts

John Martin Fischer: "Humane Retributivism"

I defend retributivism against attacks by the "moral responsibility skeptics." I then propose an original kind of retributivism in two versions. I argue for this kind of retributivism based on an expressive or conversational model of responsibility and punishment.

Kit Fine: Title TBC

Sonia Roca Royes: "Living (and philosophising) with essentialist ignorance"

Antonella Mallozzi: Title TBC

Ben Curtis: "Mackie's Vacuous Satisfaction Challenge to Moderate Monism"

Moderate Monism (aka Intermediate Monism) is the view (roughly put) that temporarily coinciding things of different kinds are distinct, but permanently coinciding things of different kinds are identical. In her (2021) Penelope Mackie raises a new and important challenge to this view ('the vacuous satisfaction argument') that has received little attention to date. In my presentation I consider this challenge, argue that it can be met, but emphasise that important lessons are learnt in so meeting it.

Helen Steward: "How to be an Optimistic Two-Way Compatibilist"

In her paper 'Compatibilism, Indeterminism and Chance', Penelope Mackie argues that it is much harder than has sometimes been thought to be a two-way compatibilist - that is to say, someone who thinks that free will is compatible with both determinism and indeterminism. This is particularly hard, she claims, for what she calls 'optimistic' two-way compatibilists - that is to say, for two-way compatibilists who believe, in addition, that we do indeed have free will. In this talk, I will present and endorse her reasons for thinking so - and survey the options which, in Mackie's view, remain available to the optimistic two-way compatibilist, given the various difficulties that arise. I'll then go on to argue that there is a position extremely close in spirit to optimistic two-way compatibilism, even though it is in fact a version of libertarianism - and defend it as the best option for those for whom that spirit, rather than the letter of compatibilism is the most important thing, in the face of the issues Mackie identifies.

Matthew Tugby: "Goal-Directedness, Counterfactuals, and Powers"

It is argued that certain artefacts and biological systems have non-trivial essential properties, namely, properties of goal-directedness. But how exactly should goal-directedness be characterised? Due to the shortcomings of behaviourist approaches to goal-directedness, there are reasons to think that goal-directedness should be analysed using counterfactuals. However, it proves difficult to formulate a counterfactual analysis of goal-directedness that is counterexample-free, non-circular, and non-trivial. These difficulties closely mirror those facing counterfactual reductionists about dispositions, though the parallels between the two debates have been largely overlooked in the literature. After outlining the parallels, we consider what lessons can be learnt. In particular, we discuss the need for a realist, non-reductionist account of goal-directedness, and explore the idea that essential properties of goal-directedness are themselves dispositions or 'powers' of a certain sort.

Helen Beebee: Title TBC

Bill Brewer: "The Role of Concepts in Perceptual Objectivity"

 Does our application of concepts in perception have a role in our understanding of the objectivity of what we perceive?

I clarify a specific version of this question and present an argument for an affirmative answer: Conceptualism. I develop an objection to the resulting position drawing on Mackie's discussion in 'Perception, Mind-Independence, and Berkeley', offer an alternative Anti-Conceptualist account of perceptual objectivity, and explain where I think the argument for Conceptualism, and also Mackie's reaction to it, go wrong.

Milenko Lasnibat: "Can we question the necessity of real definitions without fallacy?"

Fine (1994) argues that analyzing the notion of essence in terms of metaphysical necessity is misguided. Instead, he suggests that essence is better understood through the notion of real definition. Based on this perspective, he contends that essence accounts for metaphysical necessity rather than the other way around.

Mackie (2020) alleges that Fine's account of metaphysical necessity relies on the assumption that real definitions are necessary. However, she finds this assumption questionable. Mackie suggests that there could be instances where a property, despite being a strong candidate for partaking in an entity's real definition, is not a necessary property of that entity. To support this claim, she references Locke's (1847) notion of real essence, which posits that "Water is H2O" (W) constitutes the real definition of water, as this composition corresponds to water's internal structure. Drawing on Lowe's (2011) critique of Kripke (1980) and Putnam (1975), Mackie highlights that the connection between H2O and water depends on certain laws of nature, which suggests that being H2O is not a necessary property of water. Consequently, W exemplifies a case where the real definition of an entity is not necessary, given that it includes a contingent property of that entity. Mackie argues that this example undermines Fine's account of metaphysical necessity. If real definition can fail to be necessary, then the notion of real definition cannot adequately explain metaphysical necessity.

In this talk, I will examine Lowe's criticism of Kripke and Putnam to demonstrate that his reasoning does not exemplify a case where a real definition is contingent. Lowe argues that being H2O is not a necessary property of water. But, this assertion presupposes that W is not water's real definition. If Lowe were to assume that W is indeed the real definition of water, it would be significantly more difficult to argue that water might not be H2O. Thus, the suspicion that real definitions might not be necessary relies on the assumption that the proposed real definition is incorrect. Consequently, Mackie's appeal to Lowe's reasoning only

demonstrates that a proposition appearing to be a rea definition might be contingent, not that a real definition itself might have such a modal status.

In this discussion, I aim to highlight the challenge faced by those who attempt to contest the necessity of real definitions (Mackie, 2020; Romero, 2019, 2023; Leech, 2021). To do so, one must first assume that the definition at hand is false, which begs the question against that definition. Consequently, it is unclear how one could engage in a discussion about the necessity of a real definition without presupposing its truth value, thereby avoiding fallacious reasoning. By the end of the talk, I will show how this challenge manifests in the philosophy of mind (e.g., Brown, 2010; Levin, 2012; Perry, 2012) and present some potential avenues to conduct the debate about the modal status of a specific real definition.

Carla Peri: "The Nature of Haecceities"

I argue that haecceities, non-general essential categorical properties of the form being x, or being identical with x, predicated of any particular individual x, are philosophically redundant. My argument relies on the dependence-theoretic accounts for immanence. Immanence is a characteristic desired in haecceities since it fits well with their individuating role (cf. Diekemper, 2015). Immanence is captured in terms of constitution: substantial universals are constituents of substances, i.e., individuals. Such a relation can be captured in terms of essential dependence, a particular kind of ontological dependence (Fine, 1995). We ay that an entity, Φ, ontologically depends on an entity (or entities), Ψ, just in case Ψ is a constituent (or are constituents) in a real definition of Φ.

On the one hand, since a haecceity property, H, constitutes the real definition (i.e., the essence) of any object, x, and H is a feature of x, it follows that H is a constituent of the real definition of x, and x ontologically depends on H. In other words, by using Fine's standard terminology (Fine, 1995), $\Box_x(H, x)$, to be read: it lies in the essence of x that it instantiates H. Remarkably, the relation of dependence ends to take the following direction: the object x ontologically depends on the haecceity H since H is a constituent in a real definition of x.

On the other hand, since haecceities are properties which can exist even uninstantiated (Rosenkratz, 1995), the question of how any given haecceity can lock onto the same individual in any possible world is intriguing. Indeed, there are some worlds in which the haecceity refers to an individual despite its absence. To solve this impasse, it could be argued that it lies in the nature of haecceities that they lock onto a specific individual (cf. Skiba, 2021). So, it lies in the nature of any haecceity, H, that H locks into the same individual, say x. Namely, $\Box_H(H, x)$, to be read: it lies in the essence of any haecceity H that it locks into x. Accordingly, the relation of dependence ends to take the following direction: the haecceity H ontologically depends on the individual x since x is a constituent in a real definition of H. Therefore, haecceities and their bearers, the individuals instantiating

haecceities, are in a relation of mutual dependence or interdependence. In other words, the relation of dependence haecceities-bearers is symmetric.

If haecceities and their bearers are mutually dependent, then haecceities cannot afford the individuation role for which they have been generally endorsed. Indeed, the violation of strict partial ordering required by grounding determines that haecceities cannot provide explanatory criteria of individuation and identity. So, haecceities end up being philosophically redundant.

Howard Robinson "How far does Wiggins's essentialism get us?"