

November 10: Matthew Mosdell, "When to Think Like an Epistemicist"

Epistemicism is the view that seemingly vague predicates are not in fact vague. So, for example, there must be a sharp boundary between a man who is bald and one who is not bald. Although the view is often met with incredulity, my aim is to provide a defense of epistemicism. My defense, however, is backhanded: I argue that the formal commitments of epistemicism are the result of good practical reasoning, not semantic, logical, or metaphysical necessity (as the view's proponents typically argue). To get to that conclusion, I spend most of the essay arguing that using a formal system like classical logic to manage seemingly vague predicates requires an awareness of practical principles, which mediate between the formalism and what it aims to represent.

Matthew Mosdell is ABD in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Utah. He works on issues of practical rationality and on vagueness

December 1: Carl Craver, "Amnesia and Agency: Toward a Post-Lockean Neuropsychology of Personhood"

Scientists (as diverse as Eric Kandel and Oliver Sacks) and philosophers (as diverse as John Locke and Frederick Nietzsche) describe episodic memory as an essential component in personhood. Many authors emphasize suggestively that episodic memory is unique to humans. Yet it remains unclear whether and precisely how episodic memory contributes to the distinctive lives of people. In this talk, I show that many common, intuitive and reasoned judgments about the role of episodic memory in such lives are refuted by empirical evidence. I review some findings about the agential capacities of K.C., a person with global episodic amnesia, and B., a person with a global working memory deficit, to show that much of their lives as a people can be retained in the absence of episodic memory. In particular, I discuss their preserved psychological connections over time, their capacity to form a sense of who they are and who they would like to be, their ability to understand essential indexicals, and their maintained ability to make adaptive choices about the value of future rewards. My goal is to clear a new space for an agential perspective on the role of episodic memory in our lives and to make new progress in building an adequate understanding of how episodic memory contributes to the distinctive lives of persons. This talk should be of interest to philosophers, neuroscientists, and psychologists, especially those with an interest in memory systems.

Carl Craver is Associate Professor of Philosophy in the Philosophy-Neuroscience-Psychology Program at Washington University in St. Louis. His interests include the philosophy and history of neuroscience and psychology, philosophy of biology, philosophy of mind, metaphysics, and ethics.

February 16: Amie Thomasson, Title to be announced

Amie Thomasson is Professor of Philosophy and Parodi Senior Scholar in Aesthetics at the University of Miami. Her areas of specialization are in metaphysics, philosophy of mind, phenomenology, and philosophy of art.

February 23: Daniel O. Dahlstrom, Title to be announced

Daniel O. Dahlstrom is the Silber Professor of Philosophy at Boston University. His main areas of interests are phenomenology and metaphilosophy, and he has published extensively on the history of philosophy, especially the Post-Kantian German tradition.

March 22: Jim Tabery, "Testing the Blades of the Double-Edged Sword: The Impact of Causal Mechanical Explanations of Antisocial Behavior on Judges' Reasoning and Sentencing"

Abstract: The science of antisocial behavior is becoming increasingly common in the criminal court room. Forensic psychiatrists at Vanderbilt University have reported that they are genetically screening defendants charged with first degree murder for a gene associated with antisocial behavior. Neuroscientists at the University of New Mexico performed fMRI on convicted murderer Brian Dugan to determine whether he has a defective, psychopathic brain. Philosophers, scientists, and legal scholars have noted that such scientific evidence about the causes of bad behavior raises a question: Will the evidence mitigate (i.e. decrease) punishment because the perpetrator had less control over his/her actions and is thus less responsible? Or will the evidence aggravate (i.e. increase) punishment because the perpetrator posed a continued threat to society due to his/her biological make-up? This is the "double-edged sword" of the science of antisocial behavior. Because the science is so new and courts are permitting it as evidence only slowly, there is an open question about how this scientific evidence will play out in the criminal justice system. We report the results of a national experiment involving US trial court judges. The experiment was designed to test the empirical reality as well as the blades of the double-edged sword in an attempt to determine which way the sword cuts.

Jim Tabery is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Utah. His work is primarily in philosophy of biology, philosophy of science, and ethics.

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The lectures are open to all members of the FIU community. All lectures take place at 3.30 pm, check the department website for room information (casgroup.fiu.edu/Philosophy)