

AXΦI

The 1st annual Australasian Experimental Philosophy workshop

Friday 9 September 2016
Victoria University of Wellington
Murphy 305
9:00am - 5:00pm

AXΦI Schedule

9:00 – 9:20 Introductory Remarks (Justin Sytsma)
9:20 – 10:50 Session 1: Joe Ulatowski
10:50 – 11:10 Coffee Break
11:10 – 12:40 Session 2: Justin Sytsma
12:40 – 1:40 Lunch
1:40 – 3:10 Session 3: Dan Weijers
3:10 – 3:30 Coffee Break
3:30 – 5:00 Session 4: Matthew Lindauer

Joe Ulatowski (Waikato), "An Ordinary Semantic Conception of Truth? Næss' 1953 Empirical Studies Revisited"

Alfred Tarski's refinement of an account of truth into a formal system that turns on the acceptance of Convention-T has had a lasting impact on philosophical logic, especially work concerning truth, meaning, and other semantic notions. In a series of studies completed from the 1930s to the 1960s, Arne Næss collected and analysed intuitive responses from non-philosophers to questions concerning truth, synonymy, certainty, and probability. Among the formulations of truth studied by Næss were practical variants of expressions of the form 'p' is true if and only if p'. This paper calls attention to a series of experimental results Næss overlooked in his original study. These data collectively suggest that acceptance of expressions of the form '<p> is true if and only if p' varies according to what kind of statement p is.

Justin Sytsma (VUW), "Intervention, Bias, Responsibility... and the Trolley Problem"

In this paper, we consider three competing explanations of the empirical finding that people's causal attributions are responsive to normative details, such as whether an agent's action violated an injunctive norm—the intervention view, the bias view, and the responsibility view. We then present new experimental evidence concerning a type of case not previously investigated in the literature. In the switch version of the trolley problem, people judge that the bystander ought to flip the switch, but they also judge that she is more responsible for the resulting outcome when she does so than when she refrains. And, as predicted by the responsibility view, but not the intervention or bias views, people are more likely to say that the bystander caused the outcome when she flips the switch.

Dan Weijers (Waikato), "Privileging our Future Hedonic States"

As Parfit famously claims in *Reasons and Persons*, we would prefer to hear that our painful surgery is 5 hours long and finished than that it is 1 hour long and about to start. If true, this claim means that our judgments about the value of future suffering are very different to our judgements about past suffering. But, surely past and future suffering have (at least roughly) equal disvalue. Is this privileging of future suffering an irrational bias? I attempt to shed light on this question by reporting on several experiments on Parfit's surgery case and a host of cases that assess the comparative value of past and future goods in various contexts. I will argue that the experimental data show that people (at least 2,000+ WEIRD undergraduate students from California and Waikato) exhibit judgments that routinely privilege future hedonic states for themselves, but not other people or for non-hedonic goods. I attempt to make sense of the results, but we are left with more questions than answers.

Matthew Lindauer (ANU), "Experimental Philosophy and the Fruitfulness of Normative Concepts"

This paper provides a new argument for the relevance of empirical research to work in moral and political philosophy. The argument centers on the idea that normative concepts used in moral and political philosophy can be evaluated in terms of their fruitfulness in solving practical problems. Empirical research conducted with an eye to the relevant philosophical issues and distinctions can provide evidence of the fruitfulness of such concepts along a number of dimensions. Rather than just clearing the way for philosophical work in these areas, the argument has the implication that empirical research will be required to advance at least some debates in moral and political philosophy.