

University of Delaware Undergraduate Philosophy Conference
Saturday, November 7, 2009

Abstracts of Student Papers

Ross Vandegrift, University of Delaware

Abortion and Infanticide and Materialists

In "Abortion and Infanticide," Michael Tooley seeks to defend abortion and infanticide by denying moral personhood to fetuses and very young infants. The definition he builds to maintain this rift is problematic. Due the underlying required metaphysical views about mental states and selfhood, he fails to account for the moral personhood of a large number of normal, functioning adults. Some attempts are made to salvage Tooley's distinction, but it is argued that without the problematic metaphysical views, he fails to show anything about abortion and infanticide.

AJ DeBonis, Eastern University

A Comparison of Ontologies: Boredom and Wonder in Judging and Producing Cultural Artifacts

Art ought to be produced in an attempt to mediate the transcendentals, and cultural artifacts will reflect our modes of being as culture makers and artisans. In this paper, I propose that there are two prevailing ontologies by which we create: boredom and wonder. An ontology of boredom presupposes the world as a *given*, and allows for the contents of said world to be bent to the will of man. Artifacts produced from this mode of being will be static and detrimentally unsatisfying as they inhibit the Good from being mediated in their finite forms. Contrarily, an ontology of joy predicates the world as a *gift* that places good demands upon the artisan to create art that not only mediates the form of the Good, but also allows for the exigent emergence of more good art, without reducing culture makers to mere consumers. Finally, I offer these ontologies as narratives by which we will be able to judge cultural artifacts according to their congruency or incongruency with the world as *given* and the world as *gift*. Special attention will be paid to the Trinitarian understanding of being.

Katherine Sepulveda, Bryn Mawr College

Derrida and Gadamer: An Unnecessary Rupture

Jacques Derrida and Hans Georg Gadamer's perceptions of the possibilities for understanding initially appear incommensurable. For Derrida, an inevitable break, or rupture, from our previous understanding discloses our lack of knowledge and causes us to remain in continual states of unmet expectations of understanding. Gadamer, however, acknowledges the existence of rupture but emphasizes greater understanding as an achievable possibility. Derrida's account of understanding as infinitely deferred contrasts with Gadamer's characterization of understanding as an event which can and does occur. Although without adjustment, the two views exist in mutual opposition, I argue that Derrida's description of rupture may complement Gadamer's view of understanding if the Derridean account of rupture is viewed through a Gadamerian lens of understanding as an ever expanding series of events which include rupture in the process of expansion. Rupture, consequently, may exist as both an integrated and a complementary component of the ongoing activity of Gadamerian understanding.

Caitlin Bursack, Temple University

Vision in God: A Dichotomy that Still Haunts Humans Today

Nicholas Malebranche's *The Search for Truth*, published 1674–75, is Malebranche's longest and most important work. It is also arguably the most significant philosophical work that directly

reacts to René Descartes' writings. In this voluminous book, Malebranche develops his theory of knowledge, dubbed "Vision in God," among many other theories. In this theory, Malebranche argues for a dichotomous relationship between the mind and the body. Vision in God argues that knowledge is the mere passage and reception of ideas between God and the mind. The theory is laden with dualistic ontology, which presents many tensions that Malebranche attempts to resolve. The solution, like many other dualistic ontologies, rests on belief and faith in an all-perfect and simple God. Nonetheless, Malebranche presents fascinating answers to questions humanity is still asking today. Who are we? What are made up of? What are ideas?

Adam Croom, University of Pennsylvania

Wittgenstein, Kripke, and the Rule Following Paradox

In §201 of "Philosophical Investigations," Ludwig Wittgenstein puts forwards his famous "rule-following paradox." The paradox is: how can one follow in accord with a rule – the applications of which are potentially infinite – when the instances from which one learns the rule and the instances in which one displays that they have learned the rule are only finite? How can one be said to follow in accord with a rule at all? In "Wittgenstein: On Rules and Private Language," Saul Kripke concedes the skeptical position that there are no facts that we follow a rule, but that there are still conditions under which we are warranted in asserting of others that they are following a rule. In this essay, I explain why Kripke's particular solution to the rule-following paradox fails. I then offer an alternative view of how to find our way out of Wittgenstein's rule-following paradox.

Colin Smith, Temple University

The Paradox of Musical Universality

This paper considers the seemingly irreconcilable paradox of human musical practice. While the cultural artifact that we call "music" appears trans-historically, its lack of inter-cultural formal consistency threatens to reduce our understanding of *a priori* human relations to music as non-existent, and post-cultural musical taste as purely relative. However, upon empirical investigation this explanation strikes the attentive critic as dissatisfying. Thus, this paper anticipates and addresses several formal and emotive hypotheses of necessary musical meaning; while it does not purport to resolve the massive issue, it aspires to serve as something of a starting point for a pre-cultural, philosophical analysis of musical practice.

James Harrell, University of Maryland

De Re Modality and Lewis' Modal Realism: The Case for Vague Objects

In this paper, I examine David Lewis' treatment of vagueness as a problem of "semantic indecision" and conclude that this position on vagueness is inconsistent with the metaphysics of his theory of modal realism, with specific regard for counterparthood and the counterpart relation. To reach this conclusion, I subject both an exact counterpart of Lewis and a rooster to a series of possible worlds treatments designed to satisfy Lewis' criteria for counterparthood, as well as to test the limits of semantic treatments of higher-order vagueness. In doing this, I find that Lewis' suggestions for dealing with vagueness fails to pick out counterparts at several points in this series, even when given a satisfactorily precisified set of criteria for the qua relation. Rather than a clear candidate for counterparthood, we encounter instead a problem of infinite regression that could destabilize the whole project of Lewisian *de re* modal realism. I conclude by noting that accepting metaphysical vagueness into the Lewisian theory of modal realism changes nothing in the overall theory, and may in fact be the only way to save the theory from its problem of infinite regression.