

Free Will 
Moral Responsibility
& Agency

**THE 13TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE
PROGRAM**

All events will take place at **Dodd Hall Auditorium (DHA 103)** unless noted otherwise. All graduate student talks will be roughly 25 minutes long, followed by comments (5-10 mins) and a response (5-10 mins). Keynote addresses will include a talk followed by a Q&A session.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 18

Keynote Address

Miriam Schleifer McCormick

3:30-5:30pm ET

University of Richmond

Freedom to Wander and Wonder

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 19

Breakfast

9:00am ET

Dane Gustafson (University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee)
ET

9:30am

The Grounding Problem for Libertarian Free Will

Comments by: Micah Summers

ABSTRACT: Libertarians have appealed to a requirement of 'ultimate responsibility' in their discussion of free will. In order for an action to be free, the agent must be ultimately responsible for it, in some sense. More often than not, this sense will rule out the agent being causally determined. However, as the recent interest in grounding has shown, there is more than one way to be determined. In the following paper, I offer a new 'ultimacy' argument that aims to show that, on the most popular understandings of grounding and fundamentality, the libertarian is committed to free will skepticism. These popular understandings are Priority Monism and Priority Atomism. This argument is independent of the truth of causal determinism. I defend the argument against objections, in particular, the 'Ontological Middleism' recently articulated by Sara Bernstein. I then go on to explore the argument's relevance to compatibilist theories.

Seungsoo Lee (The Ohio State University)
ET

10:30am

A Paradox of Quality of Will Theories: Why Are We Blameworthy Not for Ill Will but for Its Manifestation?

Comments by: Jan-Felix Müller

ABSTRACT: According to a prominent family of theories of blameworthiness, "quality of will theories," a person is blameworthy for X if and only if X manifests her ill will. This paper aims to excavate an under-discussed paradox lurking in all such theories, with a sketchy direction for solving it. I first introduce the paradox: a quality of will theorist is committed to a suspicious mismatch between what is of a morally objectionable quality (ill will), on the one hand, and what we are blameworthy for (things that manifest ill will), on the other. I then explore several potential responses to the paradox, concluding that none of them work. I finish the paper with a sketchy direction for solving the paradox that draws upon Robert Nozick's work on the symbolic meaning of action. I further suggest that the solution will call for a novel theory of blame and blameworthiness, which combines a specific version of quality of will theory and a novel account of the nature of blame.

Martin Niederl (University of Chicago)

11:30am ET

Epistemic Defeaters, Normative Reasons, and Animal Agency

Comments by: Evan Jones

ABSTRACT: Humans are still singled out as the uniquely rational animals. This is typically cashed out in terms of humans' capacity to respond to normative reasons. Against this philosophical orthodoxy, some philosophers have recently started to argue that certain animals can in fact respond to reasons. Out of those, Melis and Monsó (2024) argue for the most robust conclusion in the literature to date via animals' capacity to respond to undermining epistemic defeaters. Although we are ultimately sympathetic to this idea, the present article is dedicated to highlighting two principled methodological problems. We first

show that we must answer both a conceptual and a methodological question regarding animals' capacity for normative cognition in order to appease staunch skeptics. We then turn to Melis and Monsó's answers to both questions, before providing two challenges for studies that allege to support their point. Finally, we close by suggesting a possible way forward.

Break

12:30-1:30pm ET

Chris Cho (Syracuse)

1:30pm ET

Towards Agent Modalist Reasons-sensitivity

Comments by: Ben Bush

ABSTRACT: Many believe that acting freely requires being sensitive to reasons. But what does being sensitive to reasons mean? According to modalism, S being sensitive to reasons with respect to some action is roughly a matter of what S does in the alternative possibilities. Still, modalists disagree on defining S: agent modalists see S as the agent, requiring us to explore what the agent would do in the alternative possibilities. However, many have argued agent modalism struggles with Frankfurt cases. In response, some propose that we should think of S as the agent's mechanism and focus on what it would do in the alternative possibilities instead. Here, I defend agent modalism by raising two issues with the mechanism view: (1) mechanism individuation, and (2) sidelining the agent. I argue that agent modalism can handle Frankfurt cases by fixing the nonoccurrence of "agent-altering events," which also helps with rational blind spot cases.

Nolan Whitaker (UNC Chapel Hill)

2:30pm ET

The Fittingness View of Moral Worth

Comments by: Justice Cabantangan

ABSTRACT: Douglas Portmore has recently defended the Concerns view of moral worth. This view says that right acts have moral worth if and only if they issue from appropriate concerns, where which concerns are appropriate are determined by what our ultimate moral concerns should be. In this paper I argue that Portmore's view should be rejected. I then develop and defend the Fittingness view of moral worth. This view says that morally worthy motives are those that are fitting for agents to have, where fittingness is normatively fundamental. This view avoids the pitfalls of the Concerns view and is a natural extension of the fittingness-first research program. Along the way, the Fittingness view reveals an undertheorized aspect of fittingness: viz., that it is subject to an analogue of G.E. Moore's principle of organic unities.

Keynote Address

Douglas W. Portmore
ET

3:30-5:30pm

Arizona State University

Responsibility for Attitudes: Control and Conflicting Normative Standards