

Undergraduate Research Symposium May 17, 2013 Mary Gates Hall

Online Proceedings

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PHILOSOPHY AND ETHICS

Session Moderator: Benjamin Hole, Philosophy

258 MGH

1:15 PM to 2:45 PM

* Note: Titles in order of presentation.

Open-Ended Cinema

Allison Renee Greer (Allison) Ross, Senior, Comparative Literature (Cinema Studies), Latin

Mary Gates Scholar, Mary Gates Scholar

Mentor: Jennifer Bean, Comparative Literature, Cinema and Media

Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogics, emphasizing open-endedness and multi-referentiality, has emerged as a central construct for analyzing how literary texts are read. Rather than reducing terms into singularities, dialogics allows for multiplicity and simultaneity. In film, a dialogic structure is an equally impactful format that has the power to problematize a narrative. Through my research and an exemplification of theory, I will demonstrate that the development of multi-referential and dialogic narrative structure is both ethical and activist: encouraging conversation and thoughtful consideration of multiple positions simultaneously instead of monolithic acceptance of a single, dominant narrative. The ambiguity introduced by the dialogic structure challenges the traditionally held binaries and dichotomies which govern so much ethical discourse. The rational subject operating within a system which places conceptual priority on a-priori knowledge and deemphasizes particularized knowledge is oppositional to feminist ethics which prioritize the personal over the a-priori rational, reclaiming those traits held as traditionally feminine as the sphere of ethics. These two systems mutually reinforce a binary dialectic and generate a contextual/non-contextual, emotional/rational, female/male dichotomy. I argue the works of Nussbaum and Kant (exemplars of these philosophies) serve to generate false dichotomies. A dialogic discourse allows for formation of the self endowed with such qualities as allow marrying context to ratiocination without placing undue priority on one over the other, generating a conception of self which is intersectional and better able to work within ethical constructs in the real world without falling back on restrictive definitions of normativity which cannot extend to reality. Dialogics does not propose a new dialectic, thereby reinforcing this dichotomy, but rather gener-

ates a polyphony of foci and meanings, allowing for a nuance and simultaneity of discourses permitting one to fully negotiate the complexities of ambiguous situations without the impulse toward reduction which often threatens to accompany resolution.

Biopower and Heterology: An Examination of Protest and Resistance through the Photographs of Abu Ghraib

Samuel Philip (Sam) Pizelo, Senior, English (Creative Writing)

Mentor: Monika Kaup, English

Contemporary theorists are still coming to terms with Michel Foucault's conception of power structures and how those relate to biopower, the State's control over its subjects. My research focuses on what Michel de Certeau calls heterology (logic of the Other) present within these structures. I use the theoretical work of Certeau to examine heterology and tactics (everyday ways of "making do") as well as Bruno Latour's framework of Actor Network Theory to chart the movement of actors within the structure. Latour also explains the "mediation" that happens, where the actor itself is changed through the process of action. It is this mediation, as part of an actor-network, that I will use to describe the photographs of Abu Ghraib, detailing the complex assemblage of military personnel, detainees, and even the non-human agency of the cameras themselves. I explore the contextual "framing" of the photography through a close reading of a number of the photographs released, an examination of their material reproduction through various news media (news outlets, Government publications, and the internet), and their reception in both American and British cultures and Iraqi culture. In addition, I use a number of secondary sources, such as the documentary film *Standard Operating Procedures* and the White House press release, to understand how the production and reproduction of these photographs might serve political reasons, either complicit with or subversive to the motives of State structures of power. Preliminary results suggest that the actor networks at Abu Ghraib engaged in politically subver-

sive behavior through an intuitive combination of competing ideologies that norms of the State could not fully capture. The "framing" of the photographs both ideologically and culturally served to portray messages that the American Government, at the time of the photographs' release, could not have anticipated or intended.

Redefining "Intentionality"

Ronald Daniel (Ron) Keller, Senior, Philosophy

Mentor: Carole J. Lee, Philosophy

Intentionality is defined as the characteristic of having thoughts that represent and refer to things in the world. While some current research suggests apes can be said to have intentionality, traditionally intentionality is a hallmark of being human. How do we come to know that an intelligent organism or system is intentional? In this presentation I will argue that an artificial system that can be described as having the same computational and algorithmic levels as a human system has the same intelligence and is plausibly intentional. This is because if the qualities we attribute intentionality towards in a human system are programmed in an artificial system, we would attribute intentionality to an artificial system in the same way we would to a human system. So, we should consider the artificial system plausibly intentional. To explain how this works I will discuss David Marr's tri-level hypothesis and Turing's ideas about intelligence and intentionality to show that an artificial system that has the same intelligence as a human system also has intentionality. I will then show how under the Physical Symbol System Hypothesis attributing intentionality may be another intelligent behavior we can computationally model.

Mind and Body

Shannon Kelly, Sophomore, Philosophy, Psychology,

Whitman College

Mentor: Patrick Frierson, Whitman College

In her letters to Descartes, Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia asks a question that many modern philosophers have tried to answer: "Given that the soul of a human being is only a *thinking* substance, how can it affect the bodily spirits, in order to bring about voluntary action?" Here Elizabeth questions the very nature of the relationship between mind and body. It is not easily understood or explained how a nonphysical substance can affect or be affected by a physical substance in order to create both sensations and voluntary movement. Through the attempts to find solutions to this problem, it becomes clear that the true problem lies in Descartes' separation of the nonphysical mind and the physical body within the idea of a person. Drawing from Spinoza, Locke, and Hobbes, I argue that mind and body are simply two ways of understanding a single, indivisible human being.

Middle Ground: Ethics for Cross-Cultural Secular Decision-Making

Megan Elizabeth (Megan) Wiebelhaus, Senior, Community Psychology (Bothell)

Mentor: Ron Krabill, Interdisciplinary Arts & Sciences, University of Washington Bothell

Secular institutions responsible for decision-making are often required to make moral decision that affect groups that live by other moral and cultural rules than their own. For instance, human rights and development organizations have worked to eliminate Female Genital Mutilation, seen as harmful and oppressive by these organizations, but as an important cultural practice in some parts of Africa. The law-makers involved in Obama Care required that employers to provide employees insurance coverage for contraceptives, even though some religious organizations believe contraception to be a sin. To understand these conflicts, I propose that these decision-making bodies must be seen as entities with moral and cultural traditions of their own which must be taken into consideration. Hence, decisions made can be seen as two groups of people with different ethics and cultural practices—one of which proposes to act on or control the other. The situations I research are those where there is no ethical common ground between the two (or more) parties on a specific issue, and where the issue cannot be side-stepped by non-action, but requires a decision. In such cases, a third ethic, an ethic of decision-making must be used. For institutions that will eschew coercion, there are a number of ethics that can be employed: an important one, both because of its scope and its claim to universality, is the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which, as its original drafters intended, was free of a metaethical stance, intending only to declare the most basic rights necessary for insuring human dignity and freedom. Universal human rights is an important ethical framework for secular decision-making in cases where the moral stances of the two parties cannot be reconciled.

Contemplating Kant's Ethical Conundrum: An Intersectional Approach to Autonomous Moral Decision-Making

Allison Renee Greer (Allison) Ross, Senior, Comparative Literature (Cinema Studies), Latin

Mary Gates Scholar, Mary Gates Scholar

Mentor: Benjamin Hole, Philosophy

This paper challenges the Kantian account of autonomous moral decision-making. Kant's definition of autonomy, I argue, is excessively narrow and does not place sufficient importance on the contextual factors which one encounters when attempting to act as an ethical agent in the empirical realm. An intersectional view of autonomous moral decision-making such as that put forth by Meyers takes these considerations more fully into account. By way of an exemplification illustrating a "real-world" scenario, I show how an appli-

cation of Kant's definition generates seemingly irresolvable conflicts. Then, through utilization of an intersectional definition of autonomy, I demonstrate how this alternative moral reasoning system allows for a more holistic understanding of individuals and the multiplicity of factors which shape and influence their situations and choices.