

# Undergraduate Research Symposium May 17, 2013 Mary Gates Hall

## Online Proceedings

### SESSION 1K

#### PHILOSOPHY AND ETHICS

*Session Moderator: Benjamin Hole, Philosophy*

**258 MGH**

*1:15 PM to 2:45 PM*

\* Note: Titles in order of presentation.

##### **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.

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##### **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 application 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.

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##### **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.

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## SESSION 2C

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### EDUCATION AND SOCIETAL INEQUALITIES

*Session Moderator: Judith A Howard, Sociology*

**228 MGH**

*3:45 PM to 5:15 PM*

\* Note: Titles in order of presentation.

#### **Education Reform in a Results-Oriented Society**

*Anthea Piong, Senior, Philosophy, English*

*Mentor: Carole J. Lee, Philosophy*

From a young age, every child in Singapore is taught that the surest way to succeed in life is to have academic success. Education is seen as a way to secure your bread and butter as it leads to a well-paying job, which then allows you to afford a comfortable lifestyle. Of course, few would argue against education being one of the most important things in a person's development. But when the stakes for being the smartest in your class are so high, the education system inevitably becomes a rat race for the highest numbers and the best scores. There is an "overbearing focus on grades and paper qualifications are elevated to unholy heights and worshipped," and this pressure gives birth to a generation of Singaporeans who are risk-averse, lack the motivation to think critically, and don't have the drive to innovate. The Singaporean education system is touted as a meritocratic one that allows students the freedom to climb the social ladder provided that they are hard-working enough to achieve the grades to advance. A meritocratic system seems fair as grades and paper qualifications don't lie, but this encourages a tunnel-vision approach to education, ignoring the many aspects of education which cannot be measured by numbers. Is meritocracy at fault, then, for creating a generation of humanistic robots? I will examine and critique the current educational system in place by highlighting its faults and advantages, as well as by drawing contrasts with the systems in other countries. I hope to propose a way to reform Singapore's education system for the better, to one that is more holistic, aiming to produce a generation of creative and motivated thinkers, which will help Singapore progress even further into the 21st Century.