Forgiveness, Blame, and the Reactive Attitudes

28 June 2017
Venue: E3A 244 (Q21 on campus map)

09.00 - 09.25: Registration

09.25 - 09.30: Welcome

09.30 - 10.40: Lucy Allais (Wits/UCSD), "Frailty and Forgiveness: Forgiveness for Humans"

10.40 - 11.05: Morning tea

11.10 - 11.55: Katrina Hutchison (Macquarie), "Forgiveness, Respect and Social Identity"

12.00 - 12.45: Adam Poviarchy (Sydney), "Blame When You’d Do The Same? Responsibility and Obedience to Authority"

12.45 - 13.55: Lunch

14.00 - 15.10: Julia Driver (Washington Uni in St. Louis), "Schadenfreude"

15.15 - 16.00: James Norton (Sydney), "Thinking about Forgiveness: A Methodological Critique"

16.00 - 16.25: Afternoon tea

16.30 - 17.40: Luke Russell (Sydney), "Asking Too Much of Forgiveness"

Contact: arts.cave@mq.edu.au
Abstracts

Lucy Allais (Wits/UC San Diego) - CAVE Distinguished Visitor 2017

Frailty and Forgiveness: Forgiveness for Humans

Julia Driver (Washington University in St. Louis)

Schadenfreude

Schadenfreude has received little sustained discussion in philosophy. It is an underexplored reactive attitude. In this paper I distinguish schadenfreude from similar reactions, and argue that schadenfreude can, at least sometimes, be a morally appropriate, and not simply fitting, response to the misfortune of another.

Katrina Hutchison (Macquarie)

Forgiveness, Respect and Social Identity

Strawson draws a distinction between what he calls the “participant stance” that we take towards those we regard as morally responsible agents, and the “objective stance” we take towards those who are not. In this paper I explore the role these two stances — and our ability to switch between them—plays in oppressive moral responsibility practices, with a focus on forgiveness. The argument has three parts. First I argue that it is better to regard the participant and objective stance as opposite ends of a spectrum, with many of our interactions with others involving a stance somewhere between. Second, I explore what sort of respect is involved in the two stances. Drawing to some extent on Stephen Darwall’s distinction between recognition and appraisal respect, I argue that the objective stance usually involves recognition respect for the person towards whom it is directed as a person. The participant stance also involves recognition respect, but in addition it involves appraisal respect for the person’s moral capacities. The different forms of respect involved in the participant and objective stance place limits on the way we can treat the people we take these stances towards. However the fact that many of our reactions fall between the two ends of the spectrum complicates this and can increase the risk of unfair treatment towards those who are socially marginalized.
James Norton (Sydney)

Thinking about Forgiveness: A Methodological Critique

Recent *a priori* investigation of the content of certain normative concepts—including forgiveness—presupposes that (amongst relevantly culturally similar subjects) there is a single, widely shared concept whose content *a priori* conceptual investigation aims to explicate. This paper empirically investigates that assumption by taking forgiveness as an exemplar. Our hypothesis was that subjects would disagree about both the necessary and sufficient conditions for something to satisfy the concept forgiveness. This hypothesis was vindicated by empirical research. We conclude that there is strong evidence that there is no single shared concept of forgiveness, and that disagreement between philosophers regarding the content of a single shared concept is therefore misplaced. Nevertheless, important and interesting work remains to be done, in the form of (a) articulating the set of concepts that the folk deploy and (b) determining whether there are normative grounds (i.e. reasons to do with what makes society go better) to push for one of those concepts being known as ‘forgiveness’ over the others and (c) working out whether we ought to conceptually engineer a concept of forgiveness not currently deployed by the folk, but which there are normative grounds for them to deploy instead. These are the questions we take to be important, and which we hope to pursue.

Adam Piovarchy (Sydney)

Blame When You’d Do The Same? Responsibility and Obedience to Authority

Milgram’s (1963) *Obedience to Authority* experiments have shown that in some settings, 65% of people will electrocute a stranger to death when instructed to do so by an authority figure. Most philosophers agree that whilst subjects in these meet the criteria to be held morally responsible for obeying the experimenters’ orders. I will argue for two conclusions. First, there is empirical evidence we could design a modified *Obedience to Authority* experiment in which over 95% of people would obey. As a result, the original 65% figure should not be treated as a maximum possible obedience rate, but merely as indicative of how higher rates could occur. Second, observing this higher obedience rate would make it inappropriate for almost anyone in the moral community to blame such subjects for their actions, despite subjects meeting the necessary conditions to be responsible for their actions. This is because in order for us to blame someone, we must first occupy a certain standing. Our standing to blame is often undermined in cases of actual hypocrisy, as well as cases where we would have acted in the same manner as the wrong doer. I argue this is what many people’s reluctance to blame the obedient subjects is responding to, and it is coherent to judge subjects blameworthy whilst maintaining they should not be blamed.
Luke Russell (Sydney)

Asking Too Much of Forgiveness

Philosophers who disagree as to what really counts as forgiveness are sometimes accused of having no good criteria against which to assess their competing theories. If there are many different phenomena in this domain, all of which are interesting and important, on what grounds could we say that only one of those phenomena is real forgiveness? In this paper I aim to set out the criteria that philosophers use when assessing these competing accounts. These consist in a range of linguistic intuitions about particular cases, common assumptions about the functional roles played by forgiveness in intra and interpersonal life, and common assumptions about the moral status of forgiveness. Once these criteria are in place, though, we see that they are not mutually satisfiable. We want forgiveness to be and do all of these things, but at best, it can be and do only some of them. We philosophers ask too much of forgiveness, and we must accept some trade offs.

mq.edu.au/cave/events