Mental Health and Agency Workshop

28 February – 1 March 2018

Venue: Dunmore Lang College, 130-134 Herring Road, Macquarie University
(W22 on campus map)

Program

Wednesday February 28

13:00 - 13:20: Registration
13:20 - 13:30: Welcome

Session 1: Cognition
13:30 - 14:20: Dominic Murphy (University of Sydney), "Delusions Across Cultures"
14:25 - 15:15: Anike Fiebich (University of Milan), "Pluralism, social cognition and interaction in autism"
15:15 - 15:40: Coffee Break

Session 2: Therapy
15:40 - 16:30: Daniel Hutto (University of Wollongong), "How narratives matter to mental health"
16:35 - 17:25: Shaun Gallagher (University of Memphis), "DBS, OCD, the 4Es and the 4As"
19:15: Conference Dinner

PTO for Thursday’s program
Program

Thursday 1 March

Session 3: Moral Implications

09:20 - 10:10: Anne Schwenkenbecher (Murdoch University), "Do group agents resemble psychopaths and if so, what does that mean for moral responsibility?"

10:10 - 11:05: Neil Sinhababu (University of Singapore), "Emotional perception and blameworthy psychopaths"

11:10 - 11:30: Coffee Break

11:30 - 12:20: Daphne Brandenburg (Macquarie/Radboud), "A case study of Strawsonian exemption"

12:25 - 13:15: Jeanette Kennett (Macquarie University), "Moral security, moral agency, and mental health"

13:20: Conference Close

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

Dominic Murphy (University of Sydney): Delusions Across Cultures

If there are interesting things to say about knowledge and belief across cultures, there should also be interesting things to say about delusions, because the attribution and understanding of delusion employs many of the techniques and concerns of epistemology. Recently it has been suggested that humans have a shared, evolved folk epistemology. If that is correct, delusions might be universal, in the sense that they represent departures from the correct functioning of folk epistemology. I argue against the idea of a shared folk epistemology across cultures and suggest that delusions are conceptually tied to characteristically modern habits of thought, rather than an inherited universal folk epistemology I address delusions in a particular context, namely, cross-cultural psychology. I introduce some distinctions among ways of understanding psychopathology as either universal or culturally particular, and then discuss the relation of delusion to folk epistemology.

Anika Fiebich (University of Milan): Pluralism, social cognition and interaction in autism

In this paper, I investigate social cognition and its relation to interaction in autism from the perspective of a pluralist account of social understanding by considering behavioral as well as neuroscientific findings. Traditionally, researchers have focused on mental state reasoning in autism, which is uncontroversially impaired. A pluralist account of social cognition aims to explore the varieties of social understanding that are acquired throughout ontogeny and may play a role in everyday life. The analysis shows that children with autism are well able to understand other people’s behavior by considering social rules and norms, scripts and stereotypes. Moreover, some individuals with autism succeed in understanding other people’s behavior in terms of mental states by employing explicit behavioral rules as a compensatory strategy. The paper ends with a discussion of the social cognitive (dys)functions in autism and their relation to the motivation of individuals with autism to engage in social interaction.
Daniel Hutto (University of Wollongong): How Narratives Matter to Mental Health

Narrative practices figure centrally in a wide range of therapies that are designed to promote psychosocial wellbeing. A sub-class of these therapies expressly seek to use narrative practices to enable individuals to establish resilient, preferred trajectories in their lives rather, than seeking to unearth the causes of trauma (Graham 2009, p. 14). Therapies in this class use narratives in different ways in their attempt to achieve this end. It will be argued that, despite these differences, all such therapies presuppose that the fact that we narrate our lives matters to our ability to enact certain possibilities, and how we narrate our lives matters by constraining the possibilities we can enact. The idea that narrative practices contribute to shaping who we are is defended under a modest formulation. It will also be argued that new thinking in philosophy of mind and the cognitive sciences can help us to understand how this can be so. Finally, reflecting on some case studies, it will be explored whether and to what extent one’s conceptions of the self –and not just of one’s characterization of oneself– might make a pivotal difference in determining if the narratives we tell about ourselves can actually help to establish resilient, life-enhancing ways of being.

Shaun Gallagher (University of Memphis): DBS, OCD, the 4Es and the 4As

Direct Brain Stimulation (DBS) is being used as a treatment for Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), as well as for Parkinson's Disease and (more experimentally) for depression. I will examine some of the outcomes of this therapeutic approach, which involve improvements in regard to the patient's sense of agency, but also involve side effects that impact the sense of self and personal identity. I'll argue that these side effects help to show that this treatment should not be conceived narrowly as simply an adjustment to neuronal processes, but is rather an intervention that affects the larger cognitive and existential system, understood along the lines of the 4Es: embodied, embedded, extended and enactive cognition. This broader, more embodied view can be specified in terms of post-DBS changes to the 4As: agency, affordance, affect and autonomy.
Anne Schwenkenbecher (Murdoch University): Do group agents resemble psychopaths and if so what does that mean for moral responsibility?

Many philosophers think that groups can be considered moral agents of sorts, provided they are structured in the right way. Corporations and states are amongst the most common examples for moral group agents. While scholars argue that these kinds of groups can be rational agents, there are very few who think that we can speak in a meaningful way about group agents having emotions. In that regard group agents seem to resemble human psychopaths, who are usually thought to lack important emotional capacities. Where human agents are concerned, the lack of empathy in particular is regularly considered to diminish an agent’s moral capacity and responsibility. Nonetheless, we tend to ascribe moral responsibility to group agents such as corporations. Should this discrepancy worry us? Should it encourage us to be more open to arguments about group agents’ emotions? Or else, does it undermine the idea of group responsibility?

Neil Sinhababu (National University of Singapore): Emotional perception and blameworthy psychopaths

I explore whether the emotional perception model of moral judgment I offered in Humean Nature suggests that psychopaths are blameworthy for their actions. This model allows emotional dispositions to both motivate action and cause the feelings that cause moral belief. It suggests that psychopaths aren't merely acting wrongly because of impaired moral belief-formation, making them like people who act wrongly because of innocent false beliefs. Impaired moral belief-formation is just a side effect of the emotional dispositions that make them act wrongly. If any of us are morally blameworthy for wrong actions, psychopaths are too.
Daphne Brandenburg (Macquarie University/Radboud University): A case study of Strawsonian exemption

In this paper I evaluate how Strawsonian exemption applies to the group of high functioning autistic individuals. I focus on the autistic deficit in affective attunement to others, and discuss its implications for responsiveness to reactive attitudes and responsiveness to moral reasons. This case study casts doubt on the Strawsonian’s assumed coincidence between responsiveness to reactive attitudes and responsiveness to moral reasons. Coincidence theorists face a dilemma. A prototypical definition of responsiveness to reactive attitudes renders this thesis counter-intuitive and unduly exclusive of marginal agents. But a liberal understanding of responsiveness to reactive attitudes allows for exempted agents to be responsive to them which means the coincidence thesis is to be denied.

Jeanette Kennett (Macquarie University): Moral security, moral agency and mental health

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