

WELCOME

Opening Statement

John Burgess
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Announcement of Honors

Presentation of Prizes

Tomb Prize

Dickinson Prize

John Martyn Warbeke 1903
Prize in Metaphysics and Epistemology

Class of 1869 Prize in Ethics

Alexander Guthrie McCosh Prize

Presentation of Books

Refreshments



GRADUATING CLASS OF 2015

David Alexander Bell
Joseph Eli Benun
Cliff Walter Bersani
Nisha Raj Bhat
Evan Charles Dallas Bullington
Liana Cornacchio
Lauren Harriet Cassani Davis
Elena Arvold Di Rosa
David Max Dworsky
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Kathryn Hess Moore
Amir Issac Mualem
Douglas Lucas Nelson
Samuel Martin Perricone
Brennan Nicholas Robbins
Matthew Spencer Seely
Joel Maka Simwinga
Jake Hamilton Taylor
Caresse Zhu Yan
Michael Christopher Zaragoza
Kevin Zhang



FACULTY

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Alexander Nehamas,
also Comparative Literature

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also University Center for Human Values
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Johann D. Frick,
also University Center for Human Values
Sarah E. McGrath

Lecturer

Victoria McGeer
Jonathan Thakkar,
also University Center for Human Values



SENIOR THESIS ABSTRACTS

David Alexander Bell

In my thesis, I combine Strawson's defense of the possibility of moral judgements independent of free will, with Frankfurt's preconditions for being a person, in an attempt to improve upon Strawson's theory. In doing so, I hope only to offer a slightly more comprehensive account of when it would and would not be appropriate to apply Strawson's exempting conditions regarding reactive attitudes.

Joseph Eli Benun

The human body is often seen as a paradigmatic example of a complex system, where there are particular constraints on assessing and predicting the outcomes of an input into the system. In this paper I look at the constraints on assessing and predicting the outcomes of inputs into the body politic through an understanding of the human body.

Cliff Walter Bersani

This thesis explores the question of whether or not we can be morally responsible for our actions, and what this means for our moral practices – specifically, the act of holding people responsible through subjecting them to praise or blame. I argue that it is not clear that we can be morally responsible, but that our moral practices are reasonable in practical terms and can perhaps even be considered fair and just regardless of whether or not we are morally responsible for our actions.

Nisha Raj Bhat

This paper is an analysis of ethical objections to commercial surrogacy. I explore a few of the most popular objections. First, I examine the claim that commercial surrogacy wrongfully objectifies children. I show that commercial surrogacy can not be equated with “baby-selling,” and I also argue that arguments that appeal to the child's welfare are unsuccessful. I then consider whether commercial surrogacy involves the wrongful



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exploitation of women, and show that the practice is not necessarily exploitative. Finally, I consider whether commercial surrogacy involves the objectification of women, and argue that this worry does not seem to justify prohibiting the practice. The many moral objections to commercial surrogacy underscore the necessity of careful regulation, but they do not seem to justify banning the practice.

Evan Charles Dallas Bullington

My thesis is concerned with the susceptibility of professional philosophers to cognitive biases and unreliable intuitions when encountering thought experiments in ethical arguments. I examine relevant intuition unreliability using empirical research largely concerning the trolley problem. Finally, I offer some normative propositions to ethicists to improve the implementation of at least one type of thought experiments in ethics.

Liana Cornacchio

This paper primarily discusses ancient Platonic dialogues in an attempt to uncover and interpret Plato's theory of punishment. With an analysis of both ancient and modern works, as well as an examination of the American criminal justice system, I argue that punishment need not be used solely as a deterrent, but rather it should be used to improve society and the individual as well as serve justice for the victim.

Lauren Harriet Cassani Davis

Are the cognitive, emotional and ethical features of close friendship—a relationship central to human flourishing—negatively affected by our increasing use of virtual forms of communication? I assess this question by discussing ancient philosophical arguments about technological change and contemporary psychological and neuroscientific accounts of empathy and attention.



SENIOR THESIS ABSTRACTS

Elena Arvold Di Rosa

In my thesis, I advance a theory of ethical responsibility based on Aristotle's discussion of the voluntary in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. I argue that people are ethically responsible for their actions when they have sufficiently developed the capacity to deliberate and act on decision, in the Aristotelian sense, and as such, can reasonably be held ethically responsible for their voluntary actions. After all, once they have developed the capacity for deliberation and decision, their actions, for the most part, can be said to reflect the irrelatively stable characters for which they are responsible.

David Max Dworsky

W. V. Quine's *Epistemology Naturalized* (1969) has elicited a wide range of interpretations and reactions, and it is also seen as an important early form of "naturalism." One common interpretation is that Quine was attempting to strip epistemology of its normative components. Modern day "naturalists" must indeed face the question whether normative dialogue is acceptable in a naturalistic framework. In this paper I defend Quine's epistemological views, and argue that his version of naturalism did not renounce normativity.

Richard Ryan Eva

I argue that the logical problem of evil does not present the traditional theist with an inconsistent set of beliefs. I then defend Leibniz's Best of All Possible Worlds defense against several objections and end by suggesting that good and evil are ontologically necessary counterparts akin to order and disorder.

Juliet Garrett

In this paper, I argue that the relevant space for equality in distributive justice is moral, not physical. Physical inequalities should be governed by a principle of modified sufficientarianism—where everybody has enough but nobody



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has so much that they violate moral equality between persons. I use the capabilities approach to define enough and too much. Finally, I argue for multiple thresholds of capabilities to ensure both sufficiency and moral equality between persons.

Thomas Zachary Horton

This thesis identifies the Aristotelian Thomistic origins of the principle of subsidiarity and traces its development through 19th–20th century Catholic social thought and up to the present day. Further, this thesis suggests that the principle can apply from the bottom-up, and it lays out a newly developed justification for subsidiarity on the basis of knowledge availability in society.

Aaron J. Kesselman

By treating law and morality as analogous, and by treating rules and laws as analogous, I argue that ice hockey's and contemporary society's moralities are significantly out of sync. In fact, the morality of ice hockey, a game invented in the late 19th century, seems to resemble ancient Greek morality (circa 500 BC) more so than it does contemporary morality.

Benjamin Robert Koons

Aristotle's account of the soul is somewhere in the conceptual space between substance dualism and materialism, and much modern commentary has been taken up with where precisely it falls on this spectrum. In the first chapter, I explain what the soul is according to Aristotle and the plausibility of his view. In the second chapter, I set out my interpretation of the status of Aristotle's account of what the soul is and show that Aristotle does not conceive of this account as a definition. Finally, in the third chapter I present and dispute Aquinas' interpretation, since he considers Aristotle's account to be a definition.



SENIOR THESIS ABSTRACTS

Gregory Milton Kraft

In *A Treatise of Human Nature*, David Hume says, “Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions.” The sentiment expressed in this sentence characterizes what most followers of Humean metaethics believe—that moral judgments are not the products of reason. Rather, reason can only serve to tell us how to best fulfill our desires. This common interpretation of Hume has led to a subjectivist moral outlook. I argue, however, that even if we accept Hume’s understanding of the relation between reason and desires, we still end up with an objective morality. Hume’s ultimate conclusion is that one only ever ought to seek to satisfy one’s own desires. It will turn out that Hume’s conclusion will also entail that one only ever ought to maximize one’s own happiness, simply based on the kinds of things desires are.

Adam Gray Millar

Structuralism is a relatively new program that has emerged within Philosophy of Mathematics. Stewart Shapiro presents a Structural Realist position. Geoffrey Hellman presents a Nominalist Structuralist position. Both believe structuralist nuances to existing views will make them more successful. I demonstrate that these structuralist additions do little to nothing to improve the realist and nominalist positions. Structuralism must find its own independent method of approaching philosophy of mathematics.

Kathryn Hess Moore

This thesis explores the nature of loving relationships and their influence as a source of reasons. First, I attempt to define love by discussing the central case of close friendship. Next, I address the relationship between this kind of love and reasons and conclude that love is a source of punctual reasons. Finally, I discuss how love as a source of reasons can interfere with other sources of reason, like morality.



SENIOR THESIS ABSTRACTS

Amir Issac Mualem

While it is not disputed here that Descartes' ideal of science did explicitly consist of certain knowledge deduced from evident and indubitable principles intuited by a pure intellect, it is not altogether clear whether and how this ought to be adopted at the expense of experimental reasoning. Although one finds no hard and fast rules as to how experiment, or experience, ought to be designed or executed, its role in deductive demonstration and in the use method will be shown to be indissociable from the formal operations of "comparison" which allow experiments to play a cognitive role in constructing problems and preparing deductions. Closer attention to his explicitly scientific and methodological essays, as well as his medical writings, will allow us to shape a more comprehensive picture of the integrated use of experimentation in Descartes' physical and physiological inquiries.

Douglas Lucas Nelson

Some commentators believe Berkeley's Idealism is actually a reified dualism or skeptical subjectivism based upon the invalid implementation of Aristotelean metaphysics or anti-abstractionism. I argue that these critics fail to recognize that perception is the foundation of both Berkeley's anti-abstraction and ontology. His philosophy is a precursor to Kant in its presumption of necessarily true knowledge of experience through a nominalistic relation of particulars via notional understanding.

Samuel Martin Perricone

Law is a positivist construction of complex rational ends all pointing toward one general rational principle: order. Since law is posited, there are no correct answers that can cross borders and resolve disputes by applying a universal rule – the laws that are created properly and provide most effectively for order in a particular society will vary along with the societies they govern.



SENIOR THESIS ABSTRACTS

Brennan Nicholas Robbins

In “A Probabilistic Approach to the Surprise Examination Problem,” I use basic facts about probability and credence functions to reconstruct a famous argument for a purported paradox: a student should not believe a professor’s decree that there will be a surprise examination. I provide four reasons to suggest that the reconstructed argument is flawed, most notably that it is self-undermining.

Matthew Spencer Seely

Throughout his career, Friedrich Nietzsche put forth a doctrine of philosophy that is, on surface, decidedly anti--spiritual. However, Nietzsche’s skepticism of the unselfing process, or the process of individual depersonalization, in fact accords with the teaching of Perennialist spiritualism, as epitomized by Mahāyāna Buddhism, since the doctrine of no self makes an absurdity of the notion of individual enlightenment

Joel Maka Simwinga

This paper argues that Nietzsche’s views on women and femininity play a critical role in his philosophy. I challenge the popular notion that Nietzsche’s views on gender are simplistic and anti-women by offering a structural interpretation of his philosophical treatment of gender that accounts for patriarchy and social construction of gender identity, and by emphasizing his deep affinity for femininity.

Jake Hamilton Taylor

In my thesis I examine three preeminent theories of humor. They are the Superiority Theory, Incongruity Theory and Relief Theory. Ultimately I find that devising one theory that correctly identifies the essence of humor is incredibly difficult because humor is not a category of phenomena but a lens through which an individual views phenomena.



SENIOR THESIS ABSTRACTS

Caresse Zhu Yan

Since its initial proposal, the Institutional Definition of art has remained highly controversial within contemporary searches for a definition of art. This thesis defends the Institutional Definition from the dilemma posed against it by Richard Wollheim (1980). It argues that the Institutional Definition not only avoids both horns of Wollheim's dilemma on both conceptual and pragmatic grounds, but further, that the definition accounts for crucial features and characteristics of art objects in both the historic and contemporary landscape.

Michael Christopher Zaragoza

This thesis argues that prominent proposed solutions to the Number Problem are predicated on a conception of fairness lacking a crucial condition for maximal and equal respect: respecting stakeholders' individual beliefs and desires. In addition to respecting the metaphysical separateness of persons, I argue that fully respecting persons also requires acknowledging their distinctness in this wider, normative sense. Consequently, I offer an original proposal which does respect what I call the "distinctness of persons."

Kevin Zhang

This paper addresses two questions: how health policy should be informed by questions of personal responsibility and how to determine substantive responsibility when it comes to diseases caused by poor lifestyle choices. I propose the Menu Theory, in which one's degree of substantive responsibility is weighed by the value of one's available options, and argue for a system of mandatory health insurance.

