

ARPA 2026 Abstracts

Abstracts for the two symposia are listed first, followed by abstracts for individual presentations (ordered alphabetically by author surname).

Canadian Philosophy Symposium

There is a long and rich history of philosophers living and working in Canada turning their attention to both general philosophical problems and those specific to Canadian society. This panel brings together both historical research on Canadian philosophers and contemporary philosophical reflection on Canada. The panel consists of three paper presentations with the presenters including: Eric Wilkinson (UBC), Madeleine Léger (Mount Allison), and Louis Groarke (StFX). The session will be chaired by Wilkinson. Similar panels are convened annually at the Canadian Philosophical Association, Western Canadian Philosophical Association, and the Atlantic Region Philosophers' Association. This will be the second year in a row that we will have convened a panel at the ARPA.

Symposiasts:

Louis Groarke, Philosophy Department, St. Francis Xavier University
“George Grant on The Death of Canadian Nationalism: Out with a Bang or Out with a Whimper?”

George Grant's notorious book *Lament for a Nation* (1965) and his subsequent role as a conservative public intellectual was motivated by an original, even eclectic mix of philosophical ideas. Grant's diatribe against the eventual absorption of Canada into our southern neighbor is rooted in a variety of conflicting sources: ancient philosophy (particularly Plato), Hegel, High Church Anglicanism, social conservatism, Leo Strauss's political philosophy. In Grant's mind, the United States of America had coalesced into an imperialist Leviathan that threatened the very existence of Canada as a distinct nation. Grant announces the death of Canada, an intellectual and moral death brought about by bad philosophy. Grant spared very few as he thundered about what he viewed as the moral and political collapse of Canada as a nation directed towards the common good. I cite from

Lament, from recent secondary literature, and from Grant's contemporaries. Grant's tone and style is reminiscent Nietzsche. I finish the paper with an apt comparison.

Madeleine Léger, Department of Philosophy, Mount Allison University
"Fertile Ground: Nature and Placemaking on the Chignecto Isthmus"

The seaside meadows of Mi'kma'ki (which is also known as the Maritime Provinces) are characteristic landscapes of the East Coast. But while they're widely regarded as beautiful natural places, these meadows were actually shaped by extensive terraforming in the seventeenth century, when early Acadian settlers used "aboiteaux" (or complex diking networks) to drain wide expanses of saltwater marsh for agricultural purposes. Modernized versions of these very drainage systems are still in use, and they continue to shape the landscape in consequential ways. For instance, on the Chignecto Isthmus (the only land bridge between New Brunswick and Nova Scotia), aboiteaux keep major infrastructure like the Trans-Canada highway, the Atlantic Canadian Via Rail line, a municipal sewage lagoon, a water treatment plant, and electricity transmission lines above water.

For the last two hundred years, discourse around the aboiteaux has been dominated by the question of whether they are "natural." On the one hand, some feel that they are a remarkably sustainable, harmonious features of the landscape that support a range of plant and animal life. On the other, some argue that they are an unsustainable intervention on saltwater marshes, which are a rare and important ecosystem. These conflicts have gained a higher profile over the last decade, as rising sea levels have highlighted the Isthmus's vulnerability to major storm events. Indeed, the threats posed by climate change have made critiques of the aboiteaux seem more plausible, since saltwater marshes are remarkably resilient to sea level rise. Thus, there is increasing interest in "re-wilding" or "restoring" marshes to their "natural" state to protect the infrastructure on the Isthmus.

While detractors of the aboiteaux raise important ecological considerations, critiquing the aboiteaux on the grounds that they're unnatural misses the mark in important ways. More precisely, framing any given place as natural or not operates on a crucial misunderstanding of what places are and how they're made. This paper

deploys an enactive account of places to argue that the meadows on the Chignecto Isthmus are problematic, but not because they're unnatural. Rather, the issue is that the aboiteaux contribute to enacting a fundamentally unhealthy place, largely because of their colonial entanglements. This is important for a few reasons. First, it serves to clarify what places are and what considerations bear on our assessments of places' wellbeing. Second, it shows that restoration discourses, when pursued in service of settler futurity, don't engage with material realities of colonialism and thus don't necessarily contribute to healthier placemaking practices.

Eric Wilkinson, Department of Philosophy, University of British Columbia
"Maquinna's Political Economy of the Potlatch"

In 1896, the Nuu-chah-nulth Chief Maquinna (c. 1835-1901) wrote in to the Victoria Daily Colonist defending the potlatch, which had been prohibited by an amendment to the Indian Act in 1884. Consisting of a system of ceremonies of religious and cultural significance, potlatches often involved the redistribution of wealth and resources within a community. The Canadian government objected to it on the basis that it promoted "paganism," and discouraged economic individualism. While objecting to the suppression of the potlatch, Maquinna articulates the economic philosophy that he takes to underpin the practice. In particular, Maquinna argues that individual people should be at liberty to transfer their possessions as they so choose, and insofar as the potlatch involves the just transfer of resources, it is unobjectionable. Moreover, Maquinna says that "our potlatch is our bank," and describes the social and economic purposes that its redistributive components are meant to serve. Members of the nation view each other as interdependent and assist each other financially as a form of mutual aid on the understanding that they will receive assistance when they themselves are in need. Maquinna analogizes this to retirement savings or a pension. He also comments on the nation-building aspects of the potlatch, which foster the sense of solidarity among members of the nation that enable them to see themselves as one people, struggling together to survive and thrive. In this article, I outline and critically examine both Maquinna's hitherto unexamined arguments in defence of the potlatch, and his account of the economic philosophy which informs the ceremony.

Atlantic Canada Wittgenstein Reading Group Symposium: Recent Work on Wittgenstein

Symposiasts:

Jimmy Plourde, Département de philosophie, Université du Québec à Trois Rivières

“Truth and Truth making in the Tractatus”

The standard interpretation of the *Tractatus* according to which Wittgenstein defends a classic version of the correspondence theory has been increasingly challenged over the last twenty years or so (e.g. Glock: 2006, Potter: 2008, Dolby: 2013) to the extent that people now tend to agree that it is not accurate. A promising alternative reading that has so far escaped most people’s scrutiny is the view that Wittgenstein would have understood truth along the lines of present-day truthmaking theory. The idea of such an account is suggested by the work of Kevin Mulligan (Mulligan: 2021) and Peter Simons (Simons: 2014 and Mulligan, Simons and Smith: 1984) who argued that Wittgenstein is committed to a non-maximalist truthmaking principle.

This paper aims to critically evaluate whether Wittgenstein's Tractarian position constitutes an early version of truthmaking. First, the paper presents compelling textual evidence from both the *Notebooks* and the *Tractatus* showing that Wittgenstein endorsed core truthmaking principles. It also examines contextual evidence, such as Bertrand Russell’s tendency to view correspondence through a truthmaking lens, which Wittgenstein may have shared.

However, the paper argues that Wittgenstein ultimately maintained a "priority of sense" thesis. This thesis is a hallmark of correspondence theories but remains entirely incompatible with any truthmaking theory. The paper concludes that the remarks about truthmaking were never intended to define the nature of truth itself. Instead, they function as an explanation as to why propositions are true, aligning him with recent "explanation-first" work on truthmaking (Rodriguez-Pereyra: 2005, Asay: 2020).

Michael Kremer, Department of Philosophy, University of Chicago
“Meaning and Use in the *Tractatus* and the *Philosophical Investigations*”

Wittgenstein is often thought to hold a “picture theory of meaning” in the *Tractatus*, in contrast to the “use theory of meaning” of his later work. In this talk, I first offer evidence, derived from my own older work, that the *Tractatus* already linked meaningfulness to ideas of use and employment. I explain how this allowed the early Wittgenstein to accord meaning, in a broad sense, to expressions that the so-called “picture theory” would seem to condemn to meaninglessness. I then reconsider the relationship between Wittgenstein’s view of meaning in the *Tractatus* and in his later philosophy, through a comparison of two treatments of the individuation of the use of linguistic signs: in the 3.3s in the *Tractatus* (including the crucial distinctions between sign and symbol, and between the essential and inessential in a symbol) and sections 547-570 of the *Investigations*. In the *Investigations* Wittgenstein revisits some of the examples discussed in the *Tractatus* in order to cast doubt on the absolute fixedness of the kinds of judgments about sameness or difference of use that he was willing to make in his earlier work. He now viewed such judgments as depending on one’s purpose in making use of one’s words, “what game one wanted to play.” This *is* a discontinuity in Wittgenstein’s thinking about meaning between his earlier and later thought; but it is a discontinuity *within* a broad agreement that meaning is tied to “use.”

Michael Hymers, Philosophy Department, Dalhousie University
Behaviourism and Private Language

Early readers of the *Philosophical Investigations* were tempted by verificationist and behaviourist interpretations of the passages on private language—interpretations that still influence readers decades later. In the case of behaviourism the temptation is explained, in part, by verificationist assumptions, but also by (among other factors) a failure to appreciate that a logically private language would derive its uninterpretability by others from the alleged superprivacy of experience. I support this claim with special attention to P. F. Strawson’s early review of the *Investigations* and Clement Mundle’s mostly forgotten 1966 paper “Wittgenstein’s Kind of Behaviourism.”

Individual Presentations

Paul Abela, Philosophy Department, Acadia University

“Kant, Wittgenstein and Large Language Models: Do LLMs Understand Anything?”

One of the major contributions Kant offered in epistemology is the governing thought that concepts are rules. Kant claimed (Critique of Pure Reason) that our ability to recognize the correct application of a rule is a capacity that cannot be taught. It is a power of ‘mother wit’. Wittgenstein (Philosophical Investigations) agreed with the priority of rules as the ground for concept application, but he argued that correct use was grounded in public forms of endorsement. Kant and Wittgenstein shared the thought that correct use of concepts as rules constitutes the power of understanding.

Recent developments in AI (LLMs) eschews a place for concepts as rules entirely. This invites the Kantian/Wittgensteinian thought: do LLM’s understand anything?

Michael Arfken, Canadian Association of University Professors (CAUT) & University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI)

“Academic Freedom and the Dignity of Work”

National and international post-secondary advocacy organizations often draw attention to the central role that academic freedom plays in a flourishing democracy. Insofar as universities are viewed as serving the common good by securing hospitable environments for pursuing and developing expertise insulated from state coercion and institutional censorship, robust protections for academic freedom are viewed as integral to securing those spaces. In this paper, we will explore the extent to which defenses of academic freedom grounded in professionalization and a guild orientation may inadvertently fuel reactionary attacks on post-secondary education. As an alternative, we will discuss the implications of viewing academic freedom as what workplace democracy looks like in the post-secondary sector.

Robert Ansell, Philosophy Department, Saint Mary's University
“‘Liberals’ Approach to Freedom’

The paper begins with an examination of passages in chapters I and III of J.S. Mill's "On Liberty", in which he questions whether the "liberal" political model will actually give people the freedom to organize society in the general or even the majority interest, and in which he rejects the idea that there are freedoms which should be unrestricted - an idea championed in chapters I and II. It is argued that much of the talk of freedom that Mill and other "liberals" engage in is ideological, but that they add notes of greater realism about the "liberal" social model, in order to lower expectations of the model while also insisting that it will deliver far more freedom than any alternative. It is further argued that indeed the "liberal" political model does not give people the freedom to organize society in the general or even the majority interest, and that determination of freedoms should be, ought to be, approached in a different way from the way in which "liberals" approach it. For example, it is argued that freedom to communicate deceptively ought to be more restricted than it is, in order to enlarge people's freedom to make well-founded decisions. Freedom of expression and academic freedom are among the freedoms that are discussed in the paper.

Connor Barry, Department of Philosophy, St. Thomas University
“Wittgenstein’s Tractatus, the Lambda Calculus and a New Conception of the A Priori”

This paper will describe Wittgenstein’s general form of the operation as an anticipation of Church’s lambda calculus and Per Martin-Löf’s intuitionistic type theory. Göran Sundholm (1992) was the first to draw an illustrative comparison between Wittgenstein’s general form of the operation and the use of Church’s λ calculus to derive arithmetic. This connection to λ calculus has been further developed by Frascaola (1994) and Marion (2008). Floyd (2021) has, following this line, recently argued an initial turn in Wittgenstein with the use of the general form of the operation towards an intuitionistic approach to mathematics. Insofar as functional abstraction is, itself, rooted in the work of Frege and Russell, recent, new approaches to foundations, drawing upon intuitionistic type theory and category theory, represent a partial vindication of the aspirations of the early

Wittgenstein and logicism (Awodey, 2016). Challenging the dogma of the a priori and a posteriori, Quine seems to have dismantled Carnap's distinction between internal, logico-mathematical expressions, and external, extensional language. Affirming set theory and classical logic as the basis of mathematics, Quine maintained that mathematical understanding should be regarded not in a priori contrast with external experience but as a practical or pragmatic outgrowth of our web of belief and experience. However, new approaches to foundations of mathematics, which draw upon the type theory of Russell have emerged, which provide a basis for a renewed understanding of the a priori as structural invariant. Mathematical structures, like the isomorphism between cartesian closed categories and the simply typed lambda calculus, can now be recognized as invariants linking such apparently different branches of mathematics as category theory, computation, logic and even topology. The historical exposition of this paper is thus meant to conclude with allusion to current approaches to mathematical logic.

Christopher Sanford Beck, Philosophy Department, Dalhousie University
“Nonhuman Well-Being and the Moral Circle: towards a biocentric consequentialism”

In his recent book, *The Moral Circle*, Jeff Sebo argues that the range of beings to whom we owe moral consideration extends far beyond mainstream philosophy's rather insular, speciesist status quo. He begins with the widely held assumptions that 1) living beings that are agential and sentient deserve moral consideration, 2) we should reduce and/or repair harms we are responsible for when we can, and 3) we should take non-negligible chances seriously. From here, he reasons that because there is a chance that many kinds of beings deserve moral consideration, “we should extend at least some moral consideration to sextillions of beings, including and especially future nonhumans” (TMC 6). In short, we ought to recognize not only nonhuman animals as potential moral patients, but microbes and artificial intelligence systems—and we ought to modify our behaviour accordingly.

In this paper I explore Sebo's position and suggest that his account is much more modest than it initially seems. Although Sebo's arguments in favour of expanded moral consideration are stimulating, his strategy of working from widely held,

relatively non-controversial premises and employing probabilistic reasoning comes at the expense of decisive conclusions. In fact, his philosophical conclusions are so couched in “maybes” that agreement with his position is relatively insignificant.

Rather than argue that nonhuman beings might be morally significant, I suggest that orthodox theories of well-being can be mobilized to bolster the idea of nonhuman well-being—even plant well-being. Therefore, if we suppose morality is fundamentally about promoting well-being (a premise I will here assume, not argue for), there is a clear consequentialist case for recognizing the moral significance of all living beings. (But perhaps not artificial intelligence systems.) To conclude, I propose that further work in biocentric consequentialism could yield a relatively plausible non-anthropocentric moral framework that more strongly support the conclusions argued for in The Moral Circle.

Christina Behme, Department of Philosophy, Kwantlen Polytechnic University

“Academic Freedom needs to remain a Pillar of Canadian Universities”

Recent national and international events have raised doubts about the importance of Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression in Canadian Universities. An increasing number of university administrators and faculty believe that the mission of a university is teaching students factual knowledge and preparing them for today’s job market.

I will argue that these goals are an important part of the university mission. However, universities also are “marketplaces of ideas” and students need to learn critical thinking and argumentation skills that allow them to evaluate competing ideas. In order to do that they need to be exposed to ideas that are controversial or inconvenient.

Using specific examples from the past I will show that it is impossible to selectively curtail Academic Freedom and Freedom of Expression. Many students won’t investigate the merits of ideas that are “off the table”. That has led to the uncritical acceptance of the Berlin Wall, the incarceration of political dissidents, and, more recently, the dehumanization of individuals expressing vaccine hesitancy.

On the other hand, individuals who question ideas accepted by the “mainstream” will do so in private. This can lead to conspiracy theories and resistance towards the status quo. I will discuss how these intellectual undercurrents can become powerful enough to overthrow the very systems of power the imposed limits of Academic freedom were supposed to protect.

Andrew Botterell, Faculty of Law, Western University

“Substituted Fault and the Defence of Extreme Intoxication”

In this paper I argue that Parliament’s response to *R v Brown*, 2022 SCC 18, violates fundamental legal and moral principles of responsibility, fault, and blame. To make a long story short, in *Brown* the Supreme Court held that the “old” s. 33.1 of the Criminal Code—which allowed the fault associated with becoming extremely intoxicated (“intoxication akin to insanity or automatism”) to stand in for the fault required for certain crimes—was unconstitutional. Kasirer J. highlighted three problems with the “old” s. 33.1: the possibility of conviction without proof of voluntariness; the possibility of conviction without proof of a constitutionally acceptable minimum fault element; and an improper substitution of fault elements.

Parliament responded by revising s. 33.1. I argue that Parliament’s response fails to address the core concerns raised in *Brown*. I focus primarily on the substitution issue. Consider sexual assault. According to the common law sexual assault’s fault element is subjective: the *intentional* application of force in circumstances of a sexual nature, *knowing* that the complainant was not consenting. The new s. 33.1, however, allows for conviction based on penal negligence—a marked departure from the standard of care—with respect to the consumption of intoxicating substances. I will argue that this gives rise to three problems. First, since penal negligence is a form of objective fault, allowing an accused to be convicted of sexual assault on the basis of penal negligence amounts to the creation of a new crime. Second, this new crime does not adequately reflect the stigma associated with the crime of sexual assault. And third, it remains the case that the new s. 33.1 allows the fault associated with becoming extremely intoxicated to be substituted for the fault required for sexual assault. When it comes to extreme intoxication Parliament should go back to the drawing board.

Todd Calder, S Department of Philosophy, Saint Mary's University
“Evil and Complicity”

Marcus Singer is probably correct when he writes that “evil is the worst possible term of opprobrium imaginable” (Singer 2004, 185). And yet, when it occurs, evil very often involves the agency of many different people who collectively share responsibility for the action or event. Should we say that everyone who shares responsibility for an evil action is an evildoer, i.e., that their actions deserve the strongest form of moral condemnation? In many cases, that would be overly harsh. For example, we might buy chocolate from a company that sources chocolate from suppliers that use child slave labour. But that doesn't make us all evildoers. We need to distinguish between evil action and complicity in evil.

But what is the difference between these concepts, and what is the moral significance of the difference? These questions have not been adequately dealt with in the literature on the concept of evil, and this has led to confusion and error. For example, on Claudia Card's plausible and popular theory of evil, the Atrocity Paradigm, it would be evil to buy chocolate from a company that sources chocolate from suppliers that use child labour. Card fails to recognize this implication of her theory, believing that her account makes an adequate distinction between evil and complicity in evil. In this paper, I argue that my Aretaic-Relational account of evil does a better job than Card's Atrocity Paradigm at making a clear distinction between evil and complicity in evil.

Dinez Clarke, Philosophy Department, Dalhousie University,
“Content and Non-Content Based Theories of Slurs and Expression”

Abstract: The proponents of both content and non-content based theories of slurs don't necessarily voice support for the use of prohibitions on speech to combat the use of slurs. However, such support for the use of prohibitions on speech can be derived from theories in either camp as a direct consequence of the source of harm identified by both camps that results from slur usage. Theoretically, both Content and Non-content based theories fail to adequately make sense of the practice of using slurs due to some fairly uncontroversial features of linguistic expression. Namely, the meanings of words change over time relative to particular linguistic

communities, competent speakers within the respective communities can understand these changes in meaning, and novel usages of words. Worse yet, downstream of the theoretical failures are the practical consequences that prohibitions on speech are ill suited for combating slur usage while undermining the expression of some targeted groups and one of the effective means for reducing the harms associated with slurs (i.e., reclamation). In this paper, I aim to provide an account for why we should consider looking beyond content and non-content based theories for understanding slurs and prohibitions on speech for combating the use of slurs

Pamela Courtenay-Hall, University of Prince Edward Island

“Energy Ethics in a new world order: Evaluating national energy priorities in Canada amidst trade wars and global wars”

This paper offers an ethical evaluation of the shifts in national energy priorities in Canada in the past two years in response to the dynamics triggered by recent trade wars, ongoing global wars, and the growing need to respond to climate change.

The shifts include: 1) **Increased support for nuclear energy** due to increasing electricity demands caused by decarbonization and AI development, and due to the promise of small modular reactors, 2) **Increased support for pipeline expansion** due to the immediate oil and gas needs brought on by ongoing wars against Ukraine and Iran. And 3) **Dramatic mobilization of public support for both** due to the economic shifts Canada is making in response to US trade wars.

But policy analysis only begins with questions like: Are the scientific and economic claims used by proponents to support these priority shifts accurate (or at least reasonable)? Are the ecological, economic and social justifications for these shifts stronger than the justifications for maintaining the level of priority that renewable energy had during the preceding decade?

The most difficult work of energy policy analysis emanates from trying to answer these questions within the large constellation of concerns that the current federal government must take into account, including:

- Taking seriously the rights of Indigenous peoples and of all those impacted by the immediate and long-term risks and impacts of all energy options,

-Having to institute energy and economic policies that enhance Canada's resilience without attracting increased tariffs from the punitive and unpredictable Trump administration,

-Having to conduct domestic energy and economic policy in ways that avoid the risk of separation by Alberta or by Quebec.

-Having to conduct domestic energy and economic policy in ways that either inform or appease citizens who may not understand or recognize the mechanisms involved in just energy transitions.

Mary Jo Curry, Philosophy Department, St. Francis Xavier University
"Incommensurability and Political Organization"

In his book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Kuhn controversially used the term 'incommensurability' in his argument for a non-linear historical progression of science. Over the years, the term 'incommensurability' has been adopted by social and political philosophers such as John Rawls, Richard Rorty, and Alasdair MacIntyre. The term has been highly contested, with some thinkers acknowledging the need to accommodate "incommensurable" worldviews, while others lament the potential damage that could result from adopting such a relativistic conception into political philosophy. In my paper, I will offer support for the adoption of a specific understanding of 'incommensurability' into social and political philosophy. I will, further, elaborate on what I see as the logical consequences of adopting this conception beyond the realm of scientific paradigms and into the domain of metaphysical worldviews more generally. I will support a conception of 'incommensurability' that, I argue, has implications for political organization, our understanding of the public sphere, reciprocal justification, and rational inquiry

Paul Curry, Philosophy Department, St. Francis Xavier University
"How Nature Constrains a Moral World"

Drawing on Sellars's critique of the Myth of the Given, McDowell argues that experience is conceptually structured without thereby losing its claim to

objectivity. Moral perception likewise depends upon a cultivated “second nature”: the capacity to recognize features of situations as reasons for action. Yet this account faces a familiar problem. If moral perception depends upon historically contingent formation, how can we distinguish a virtuous second nature from an ideologically corrupted one?

This paper considers whether Wittgensteinian hinge certainty and Aquinas’s natural law can jointly address this problem. Some fundamental moral orientations function as hinges: they are manifested primarily in action and perception, rather than inferred from prior principles, and form part of the background against which moral justification and doubt become possible. Hinge analysis explains how moral commitments become practically authoritative within a form of life, but not why their content is true; vicious orientations may also become resistant to doubt.

Aquinas’s account of natural inclinations offers a possible constraint. Human vulnerability, dependence, sociality, and rational agency do not determine a complete ethical theory, but they may delimit the range of adequate moral formations. This appeal to first nature must not, however, reintroduce a moral version of the Given. Facts about human beings acquire moral significance only within the space of practical reasons. The proposal is therefore modest: first nature supplies a reality to which moral formation remains answerable, while hinge certainty helps explain how responsiveness to that reality becomes embodied, socially transmitted, and operative within second nature.

Dimitrios Dentsoras, Philosophy Department, University of Manitoba
“The Craft Analogy in Plato’s Euthydemus”

The essay sketches out some lessons from Socrates’ use of the craft analogy in the first hortatory speech of *Euthydemus* (278d-282e), where Socrates attempts to convince Clinias to devote himself to the pursuit of wisdom and virtue. Drawing a parallel between virtue and crafts such as navigation and medicine, Socrates tries to show that virtue is both necessary and sufficient for happiness. The passage is both significant and controversial. Interpreters of the passage fall in two broad camps. The first maintains that virtue is able to provide a wide range of bodily and psychic goods, which constitute happiness. This view, while in line with the craft

analogy, makes the sufficiency claim implausible. The second camp tries to bolster the sufficiency claim by presenting virtue as the source of psychic goods, rather than any external possession. This focus on virtue's internal effects seems to be in contrast with the craft analogy.

The essay provides a new interpretation of the passage that retains the craft analogy and the idea that external and psychic possessions have a role to play in achieving and increasing one's happiness, although their role is secondary to and dependent on the possession of virtue. Additionally, the essay offers an argument in favor of virtue's sufficiency for happiness, based on the idea that virtue functions in a manner that is sensitive to one's circumstance and can adapt one's expectations and possessions to the situation. According to this adaptive model, happiness includes the possession of both external and internal goods, but the amount and scope of these possessions might vary according to circumstance. Virtue is sufficient for happiness because it unfailingly provides the maximally beneficial amount of goods one could secure, under a given set of conditions.

Jane Dryden, Department of Philosophy, Mount Allison University
"Feminist Philosophy and Hegel's Philosophy of Nature"

There are many things about Hegel's philosophy of nature squarely at odds with feminist tenets, including justifications of hierarchies at the level of nature that translate into hierarchies of human beings at the social level. This paper will not defend these hierarchies or Hegel's sexism, racism, or ableism. Rather, given points of convergence between feminist philosophies of nature and Hegel's philosophy of nature, examining tensions within Hegel's work provides perspective on thinking of nature and culture now.

Hegel challenges dualistic binaries throughout his system, but his philosophy of nature risks upholding one between nature and Spirit (Geist). While they are not opposing forces, Hegel's description of nature as "Spirit estranged from itself"¹ means that the lingering effects of nature can be interpreted as barriers to Spirit's full actualization. Humans more closely connected to nature are perceived as less developed, leading to sexist, racist, and ableist conclusions.

However, Hegel's work also emphasizes our deep embeddedness in nature and the complex interdependence of all beings. Spirit is not just human consciousness, or just culture. The work Hegel attributes to Spirit – organization and interdependence – is not actually separate from nature's work. We do not ever escape nature but continue to be shaped by it, even in the midst of our free development as Spirit.

Recent work on Hegel's philosophy of nature notes connections to contemporary philosophy of biology,² and the recent Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy entry on Feminist Philosophy of Biology notes areas of convergence between feminist and nonfeminist philosophy of biology.³ It is a worthwhile time to dig into Hegel's work to see how and whether those pernicious hierarchies could be avoided while keeping deep relationality, and what lessons that project might have for contemporary feminist thought.

Benjamin Moshe Eneman, Department of Philosophy, University of Texas at Austin

"Shame, Love, and the Normativity of Moral Psychology"

In "Grace and Alienation," Vida Yao articulates a compelling and beautiful account of gracious love, centered on its power to overcome shame. Drawing on Marilynne Robinson's *Home*, Yao explores gracious love as an affectionate and attentive response to basic features or qualities of human nature that we find in others. This account has a lot going for it. If successful, it allows us to keep ahold of moving Murdochian insights without having to buy into a costly, unclear, and worrying metaphysics. It lets love for flawed, petty, morally-deficient people be both attentive to those features and capable of bringing the lover and beloved together. But I remain somewhat troubled by the account, and suspect it to be subtly emblematic of a set of methodological assumptions in moral psychology that stand in need of revision. In this paper, I explore that trouble and lay out a groundwork for understanding it. In section one, I briefly recapitulate Yao's account and offer a couple of preliminary challenges. In section two, I argue that Yao's account depends on a key structural and methodological assumption—that we ought to treat shame as a kind of fixed psychological point which an account of love has to engage with in some way—and unpack and challenge that assumption. In section three, I broaden the scope from Yao's point to a general methodological claim

about moral psychology. Specifically, I argue (as part of a broader project) that we ought to treat moral psychology as normative all the way down.

Andrew Fenton, Philosophy Department, Dalhousie University

“Deserving a better option than humane death: Defending rehoming as a default at the completion of scientific animal use”

Rehoming is an emergent issue in the ethics and regulation of scientific animal use. The Canadian Council on Animal Care (or CCAC) is the sole body at the national level that oversees the guidelines and ethics of scientific animal use followed by certified institutions in Canada. In its new guidelines, “Outcomes for animals at the end of scientific activities,” rehoming is recognized as one of the possible outcomes to be considered at the completion of an animal’s scientific use. It gets first mention in that document when discussing outcomes and also better aligns with the CCAC’s fundamental ethics principles than killing the animals, however humanely. Despite this, to the best of my knowledge, most animals used in Canadian science are killed at the completion of their use. My claim that rehoming better aligns with their fundamental principles can be teased out of their “CCAC Ethics Principles for Animal Use in Science” document, as I will show in my discussion. That the obligation for rehoming also arises out of defensible reflective ethical considerations will also be discussed. My discussion will then turn to some current and pressing issues facing the rehoming of animals after scientific use and how those issues can be resolved in favour of the animals.

Sarah Feldman, Department of Philosophy, Mount Allison University

“Heraclitus on Knowing How to Say Nothing”

This paper suggests that Heraclitus presents his logos – that is, his discourse – as deliberately and productively failing to engage in meaningful speech. In the process, he draws attention to an epistemic impact that depends, paradoxically, upon the failure to meet the cognitive and communicative conditions for saying

anything at all. At the same time, he seems to deprive all other speech of any claims to meaning.

My argument focuses primarily upon the programmatic fragment B1. Here, Heraclitus outlines the nature, virtues, and subject matter of his own discourse, establishes its position in relation both to other discourses and to reality itself, and describes its reception by the audience. On the one hand, Heraclitus presents his own discourse as a kind of paradigm of *logoi* in general. His discourse, he suggests, is exemplary: it realizes the work of speech and language more fully than any other efforts. At the same time, he makes his discourse stand for all others via ambiguities that systematically blur the boundaries between “what my particular discourse says and is” and “what any and all speech says and is.” On the other hand, Heraclitus’ presents his *logos* as a failure; it cannot get purchase on the cognitive faculties of his listeners. In a cultural and historical context where discourse is understood as a thing defined by its communicative and intersubjective features – a context where to speak is to be heard, and to be is to be perceived – this implies that his *logos* actually fails to be a *logos*.

Liam D. Ferguson, Philosophy Department, Saint Mary’s University
“G.E. Moore and Analytic Philosophy”

G.E. Moore was an early analytical philosopher, who wrote during the same time as American pragmatist William James. In this essay, I consider Moore's article in response to James's essay on the pragmatic definition of "truth." I discuss that although Moore makes multiple sound points against James's position, he is too conciliatory to the pragmatic position. Since Moore was of the analytic orientation alongside the likes of Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein, James's ideas that truth is mutable and can thus be altered to include things such as "usefulness" should have been more forcefully attacked by Moore. However, Moore does make some interesting arguments against James's position, and these are considered at length. I conclude that although Moore critiques James, he is too narrowly focused to provide a thorough rebuttal to James's position. Moore’s ideas for his rebuttal of the pragmatic version of truth, although they do not go far enough, should be revisited if academic freedom is to have a future. Only the truth is true, not anything else, including what James argues in favor of (e.g., what is useful).

Jennifer Flynn, Department of Philosophy, Memorial University
“A Philosophical Account of Homesickness”

Contemporary philosophers have said some about the concept of home.¹⁻⁴ But they seem not to have directly discussed homesickness, which psychologists understand as “a negative emotional state attributed to missing home and themes related to the home environment.”⁵ In my view, work in philosophy can supplement and improve psychological accounts of homesickness as a negative emotional state. My central claim in this paper focuses upon two negative feelings psychologists associate with homesickness: feelings of a loss of self, and feelings of unsettledness. I argue that philosophy can help us better understand the causes of these feelings.

My first argument, which deals with feelings of a loss of self, urges that being away from the place one considers home can reduce cognitive functionality in a way that disrupts one’s sense of who one is. Here I draw upon Cara Nine’s philosophical work on the harms of moving from one’s house.⁶ I also draw upon recent work on dementia and the self, which suggests that familiar surroundings can “scaffold” identity, and that unfamiliar ones can disrupt it.⁷

My second argument, which deals with feelings of unsettledness, suggests that being away from home can upend one’s vision of a worthwhile life, leading to feelings of unsettledness. Here I invoke philosophical work by Krishnamurthy and Moore, and by Stiltz, on the wrongs of gentrification and displacement.⁸⁻⁹ More specifically, I appeal to their discussions of located life plans, and on what motivates claims to occupancy rights.

Mark Fortney, Philosophy Department, Dalhousie University
“Generative AI, de-skilling, and our right to mental integrity”

Early research suggests that some ways of relying on generative AI tools can cause de-skilling in generative AI users. In this paper, I focus on the example of critical thinking de-skilling, since critical thinking is a central mental capacity. My goal is to articulate an underappreciated morally significant aspect of this kind of de-

skilling. All other things being equal, to cause critical thinking de-skilling in a generative AI user is to violate that user's rights, namely their right to mental integrity. The right to mental integrity is analogous to the right to bodily integrity. It is, minimally, a right to be free from significant, nonconsensual interference with one's own mind. Mental integrity includes not just freedom from interferences with one's mental states, as some other writers on mental integrity have emphasized, but also freedom from interference with one's mental capacities.

Jeff Frooman, Department of Philosophy, University of New Brunswick & Gaurab Bwardwaj, Division of Management, Babson College
"Lacking Clarity"

Moral ambiguity. The term is freely tossed about in the applied ethics literature, with the phrase showing up in hundreds of articles on moral decision-making published in the last 40 years. But what is it? Unfortunately, almost no authors bother to define it.

Having reviewed 138 articles we create two definitional typologies that flesh out the construct as it is used, with the second being a 2x3 showing the six broad usages of the term. The "logic" of the typologies are defended—that is, an explanation of the horizontal and vertical dimensions is presented and their relationship to each other made clear. Paradigmatic examples of each usage are then presented, to help make the construct more accessible to the reader.

One usage proves of particular interest to us—the one stemming from epistemic uncertainty. This form of moral ambiguity arises when critical facts are not known, or cannot be interpreted, or at least are not consensually interpreted by the decision-makers. We further break down epistemic uncertainty into sub-classes, including scientific, technical, cultural, linguistic, reflexive, and ecclesiastical. Together, these help to explain why securing the necessary knowledge to reduce moral ambiguity is often problematic.

Finally, we provide a brief discussion about what is not moral ambiguity, because some authors confuse the term with other constructs. For instance, failing to see a moral dilemma due to lack of training (imagine here, an inexperienced school counsellor dealing with an unfamiliar classroom disruption) is not moral

ambiguity. After all, if one don't see oneself as facing a moral issue, then one can't be confused about what action to take in order to be moral.

Jason Holt, School of Kinesiology, Acadia University

“The Aesthetics of Know-How”

Here I explore an underappreciated object of aesthetic appreciation: know-how, which unlike theoretical knowledge and basic skills consists in specialized skills, strategies, and virtues. As realized in art, a know-how aesthetic seems particularly modern and was plausibly popularized by Hemingway. My focus, however, is the aesthetics of know-how not in literature but in film, specifically certain genres and exemplars showing Hemingway's enormous influence on such figures as Howard Hawks: the western (e.g., *Rio Bravo*), the war film (e.g., *Sergeant York*), the spy film (e.g., *From Russia with Love*), the martial arts film (e.g., *Enter the Dragon*), the police procedural (e.g., *Manhunter*), and the con film (e.g., *House of Games*). Such cases illustrate the aesthetic appeal of skill and strategy especially under duress requiring the exercise of virtue. We should thus acknowledge the significance of a know-how aesthetic not only in art but also in life.

Maggie Hynes, Concordia University and Memorial University

“Academic Freedom in the Age of Trump, Digital Surveillance, and Neoliberalism”

My paper argues that in the age of Trumpism and neoliberalism, together with digital surveillance technology, universities and their faculty and students have become mere instruments of the state and the market. As in Derrida's reading of Kant's *The Conflict of the Faculties*, academics are no longer artists or technicians, but public servants. Kant originally wrote “It is absolutely essential that the learned community at the university also contain a faculty that is independent of the government's command with regard to its teachings,” (Hunter 51) but Derrida argues this is no longer the case. Namely, academic freedom has been compromised to protect the corporate interests of the Academy. The Academy no longer upholds independent or challenging thought, but punishes it and anyone who dissents from its corporate machine or compromises its financial interests.

During the Covid-19 lockdown, digital surveillance technologies were more widely used to prevent cheating on online exams. Following Foucault, I argue that The Academy is a panopticon, using these digital surveillance technologies to expel and deport students for their writing and peaceful protest. The principle of “academic freedom” is simultaneously harnessed to protect students for hate speech while deporting international students for speaking out against the wealth disparity among university faculty or complicity in genocidal regimes, for example.

Adam Jackson, Department of Philosophy, York University
“Freedom of Expression and the Conditions for Disagreement”

Academic freedom is tightly linked to freedom of expression, for which a requirement seems to be the ability to disagree about any topic, including those topics that seem closed off from further debate, e.g., whether the earth is flat. If we are unable to disagree about topics, even those that seem closed off from debate, then freedom of expression—especially in the academic sphere—appears to be threatened. What are the conditions for disagreement? And perhaps more importantly, what are the conditions for *deep* disagreement—those disagreements that stem from divergent fundamental values and beliefs? One proposed way of understanding disagreement comes from Davidson (1973a), in which he argues that to make sense of any disagreement we have with someone, we have to maximize the extent to which interlocutors share a large background of beliefs. When read in conjunction with Davidson’s (1973b) radical interpretation thought experiment (which asks us to imagine what kind of resources we would need to interpret a speaker of a language about which we have no knowledge), the resulting picture is one where even with speakers whose language we do not speak, and of which we have no knowledge, we should expect to find a large background of beliefs that we share. However, it seems that if freedom of expression is to maintain its importance, we need to include in our understanding of it not just disagreement, but *deep* disagreement. In this paper, I argue that we can extend Davidson’s arguments to fundamental values and beliefs, such that we can only make sense of deep disagreements if we share a background of fundamental values and beliefs with our interlocutors. If I’m right, this gives a reason, in principle, to

be optimistic about academic freedom having a future, for its required conditions are built into disagreement and deep disagreement.

Tim Kenyon, Brock University

“Neutrality, Quotation, and the Norm of Newsworthiness”

Traditionally, the discussion of newsworthiness in journalism studies has focused on the norms and values conditioning the production of news, including the professional criteria by which news stories are chosen, framed, edited, and paired with multimedia sources like photos and video. The issue of language pragmatics and the role of newsworthiness in audience reception of media has more recently been discussed through the literature on both-sidesism and journalistic neutrality in news media. Giulia Terzian (2025), for example, has discussed the question of what is pragmatically conveyed by the fact that something is presented as news. These issues interact in highly significant ways with questions of the depiction of quotations from political figures.

I build on this work by arguing that inclusion choices, exclusion choices, and framing choices for both direct and indirect quotation interact with a pragmatic norm of newsworthiness, a special version of a relevance norm that shapes how these choices influence audience uptake. These issues come together in various ways in news media and public discourse, via phenomenon such as “sane washing”: representations of political speech that elide or massage away outrageous falsehoods, extremism, or outright incoherence.

This is sometimes described as an artefact of a bias towards coherence. But the bias towards coherence itself may be in the service of the bias towards neutrality, even-handedness, or both-sidesism. It is natural for media workers inculcated with the importance of this kind of structural balance to be biased towards coherence in the interpretation and representation of that speech, as a means of creating the

structurally balanced discourse that can feed into a bias towards neutrality. A distortive kind of charity, laundering and dignifying degenerate political speech, is a foreseeable consequence of these pragmatic effects and interacting biases.

Evan Knott, Department of Philosophy, University of Guelph
“The Dual Theory of Aggression”

The literature on aggression posits two extremes: reductive biological determinism, which views aggression as an immutable evolutionary drive, and social constructivism, which treats it merely as a cultural artifact. Yet, both frameworks fail to adequately account for the normative architecture of sport, in which identical physical actions are classified as either legitimate forms of aggression or as moral and legal transgressions, depending on the context. Consequently, a robust philosophy of sport requires an account of how displays of aggression vary across distinct social practices.

This paper proposes a Dual Theory of Aggression to resolve this dichotomy. The first component posits a biological substrate—an evolutionary mechanism (old biological machinery) in nature, designed for physical activation and competitive drive. Rather than attempting to suppress or eliminate this drive, sport serves as a primary cultural site for diffusing, articulating, and governing it. The second component posits a variant and context-dependent normative boundary. Because humans are fundamentally nurtured and socialized creatures, the threshold for crossing the line—ethically, legally, or institutionally—is not fixed by biology, but defined by specific normative frameworks (e.g., law, business, combat sports, or contact team sports). By separating the natural biological impulse from the shifting contextual rules that govern it, this dual model explains how sport successfully channels innate aggressive capacities while providing a precise, field-specific taxonomy of when permissible physicality degrades into impermissible violence.

Madeleine Léger, Department of Philosophy, Mount Allison University
“Property and Placemaking on a Changing Earth”

Many philosophers have critiqued private landownership on the grounds that it exacerbates inequality and generational wealth disparities (e.g., George 1879; Albertus 2025; etc.). Fewer have articulated these concerns through the lens of placemaking—i.e., the work of enacting healthy places for oneself and others. This paper makes two related arguments about the tensions between private property and healthy placemaking during an age of climate crisis.

First, I outline the more obvious—but still urgent—problem with commodifying land, particularly during times of ecological collapse. I illustrate these dynamics with a case concerning a private residence near Shediac, NB, where a homeowner recently erected a massive sea wall around their newly built cottage. While the wall may insulate the construction from rising tides and storms, it does so by shifting risks onto the beach below. Cases like this one show that incentives at the heart of private property make (many of) us worse placemakers and exacerbate the dynamics that contribute to climate crisis.

Second, I argue that climate change reveals an untenable assumption in standard Western property schemes. In most jurisdictions, land is treated as a long-term asset, and zoning regulations assume stable conditions and uses for pieces of land. But extreme weather events and disrupted seasonal rhythms are straining this assumption. In an age of climate crisis, parcels of land will rapidly change and come in and out of existence, making this form of ownership challenging, if not futile. Accordingly, I argue that climate change underscores the need to revisit the temporalities of land occupation. To illustrate a fruitful alternative, I turn to the Elizabeth River Project, a wetlands conservation group in Norfolk, Virginia. This group implemented a rolling conservation easement on their headquarters, which is currently located on an eroding coastal plot. This established a multi-decade timeline for their gradual departure as the plot progressively re-becomes wetland. Using this example, I show that healthier placemaking must involve structuring one’s tenancy in accordance with expected placial change.

John MacCormick, Faculty of Law, Université de Moncton

“Following the argument where it goes: Academic Freedom and the Duties of Good Faith”

My paper will argue for the centrality of the concept of good faith in an understanding of academic freedom and its limits.

I will argue that in the context of Canadian law, where academic freedom is principally a contractual right found in faculty collective agreements, the contractual principle of good faith provides a more coherent basis for establishing the limits of academic freedom than balancing tests derived from administrative law. Good faith in this context includes both sincerity and what a recent judgement has called “loyalty to the venture”, which here means that academic freedom must be used to advance the project of truth-seeking that constitutes a university. On my account, good faith academic expression enjoys strong protections from institutional interference, while bad faith academic expression enjoys none.

I will also argue that a broad scope for honest academic inquiry, which is nevertheless bounded by the requirements of sincerity and commitment to the scholarly enterprise, is appropriate on the level of principle. Drawing on Plato’s explorations of the commitments that are necessary for fruitful dialogue, as well as on Seana Shiffrin’s thinker-based theory of free expression, I will argue that good faith is necessary to our efforts to advance understanding. The limits that good faith imposes on the exercise of academic freedom are therefore internal, not only to the contractual sources of academic freedom, but also to the enterprise that it exists to advance.

While my focus is on these internal limits, a word will also be said about how good faith can help us understand the scope of external limits on academic freedom from such sources as human rights law and the law of defamation.

John E. MacKinnon, Philosophy Department, Saint Mary's University
"The Aesthetics of Smoothness"

In this paper, I discuss the aesthetic quality of smoothness, particularly as it figures in corporate and institutional "rebranding" efforts. Although above all a tactile quality, smoothness can be conveyed visually, which accounts for its importance in the field of graphic design. I draw on Edmund Burke's reflections in his *Enquiry*, not just his claim that smoothness is indispensable to beauty, but also his recognition of a "chain in all our sensations" that ensures that the various senses "bear an analogy to, and illustrate [...] one another." On this view, though smoothness is "a principal cause of pleasure to the touch," it counts, too, as "a constituent of visual beauty." I proceed to discuss the work of Byung-Chul Han, in particular his book *Saving Beauty*, where he describes smoothness in art and design as "the signature of the present time" and, as such, symptomatic of what he regards as the prevailing "crisis of beauty." Smoothness, for Han, belongs to a network of concepts. I will devote particular attention to the connection between smoothness and information (as distinct from knowledge) and between smoothness and transparency (as distinct from mystery, ambiguity, nuance).

Samuel James MacQuarrie, Philosophy Department, Saint Mary's University
"The Continental Phenomenon: The Methods by Which Intellectual Rubbish Is Passed Off as Philosophy"

The leading Continental Philosophers are united in their insistence on the distinctiveness of their methods from those of natural thinking in science and everyday life and so their works have proven resistant to epistemic evaluation. Nevertheless, they are widely venerated as decisive contributors to philosophical knowledge. In this paper, I present a method for systematically evaluating the claims found in Continental Philosophy. I focus on the work of leading Continental figures such as Heidegger, Sartre, Derrida, and Foucault, and argue that existing attempts to discredit Continental Philosophy are inadequate. Trivial truths are not unverifiable, and committing a category mistake does not invariably result in a meaningless statement. Moreover, to establish pervasive defects in Continental Philosophy, as I will show can be established, criticizing a few notorious lines (e.g., "the nothing itself nothings") will not do.

To arrive at a substantive assessment of Continental Philosophy, what is needed is a method of analyzing claims that are representative of the enterprise. This can be done by employing the method of random sampling together with an examination of passages praised by leading commentators (to demonstrate that the celebrated passages are no different in quality from those selected randomly). With this method, samples are drawn from the final few lines of fixed page intervals (e.g., every fifty pages), with the interval varied according to the length of each text. The resulting passages are subjected to careful, line-by-line analysis.

With a few examples from the sampled texts, I present what I have found to be typical of these writings. I proceed to identify and discredit a common set of practices that pervades the writings of Continental Philosophers.

Angus Mancini-Miller, Philosophy Department, Toronto Metropolitan University

“Confronting the Void: Philosophical Pessimism and Existentialism”

This paper analyzes the relationship between philosophical pessimism and existentialism. Although both traditions recognize suffering, meaninglessness, and the absence of an inherent purpose in human existence, they respond to these conditions in fundamentally different ways. I begin by examining David Benatar’s asymmetry argument and his axiological case for philosophical pessimism and anti-natalism, distinguishing his position from the metaphysical pessimism of Arthur Schopenhauer and Philipp Mainländer. I then address contemporary criticisms of existentialism, particularly those advanced by Hans Jonas and Alasdair MacIntyre, arguing that these critiques misunderstand existentialism’s emphasis on freedom, subjective appropriation, and responsibility. Turning to Søren Kierkegaard, I demonstrate the striking similarities between his pessimistic reflections on existence and Benatar’s conclusions, particularly in *Either/Or* and his later journal entries. Yet Kierkegaard ultimately diverges from Benatar by treating suffering and meaninglessness not as worthwhile evidence against existence, but as conditions that confront the individual with the necessity of choice and selfhood. I argue that Kierkegaard’s dialectical approach provides an antidote to pessimism: while it accepts the bleakness of existence, it refuses to grant that bleakness the final word. Meaning, on this account, emerges through the

individual's passionate commitment to truth, responsibility, and individuality rather than from an objective telos inherent in the world.

Rhonda Martens, Department of Philosophy, University of Manitoba
“Epistemic feelings: sensing and sense-making”

The “tip of the tongue” experience is very common. Same for the feeling of forgetting and the feeling of knowledge. These are examples of epistemic feelings, and they are of interest to epistemologists and psychologists in part because they motivate epistemic behaviours. For example, the feeling of forgetting might lead to a checklist rundown (got my keys? Wallet? Phone?). The feeling of knowing (FOK) might lead someone to conclude that an epistemic question is now closed, and no new information is needed. The feeling of surprise might lead someone to seek more information.

When well-calibrated, epistemic feelings are useful, cognitively inexpensive, and rapid signals of our epistemic states. Velasco and Loev (2025) give the example of a trivia game show where the contestants must be first to push the buzzer to get first shot at answering the question. Sometimes they hit the buzzer extremely quickly. This suggests that contestants experience the FOK before articulating the answer to themselves, and they rely on the FOK to predict that they will answer the question correctly.

Cognitive biases can produce miscalibration problems, which makes the cognitively inexpensive and rapid nature of epistemic feelings less useful. Other dysfunctions covered in the literature include how epistemic injustices can lead us to discount our epistemic feelings, even if they are well-calibrated (e.g., Bortolan 2024).

In this talk I focus on difficulties with sensing and making sense of epistemic feelings. Such difficulties can occur even when epistemic feelings are well-calibrated and in the absence of epistemic injustices. I outline how cognitively expensive it is to navigate the world without the right kind of sensitivity to, and understanding of, epistemic feelings.

Carolyn McLeod, Department of Philosophy, Western University
“Belonging”

Psychologists have long argued that belonging is essential to human well-being. What they have in mind is a kind of psychological connection rather than mere membership in a group—what I call ‘belonging with’ rather than ‘belonging to.’ Despite how much psychologists have written on this phenomenon, it’s hard to get a handle on it from their work because the definitions they give are inconsistent or lack depth on key properties they attribute to belonging (e.g., feeling accepted). In this talk, I will give a conceptual analysis of belonging that aims to get at the heart of what psychologists mean by ‘belonging.’ Drawing from their theories and the very little philosophers have said on this topic, I will argue that belonging with others amounts to feeling accepted by or included among them such that we feel no need to prove that we should be included. I will discuss how or to what extent belonging, so understood, admits of degrees, and how it overlaps with yet is distinct from similar phenomena such as “fitting in” with others. On this last point, I will show how fitting in by conforming to a group in ways that are inauthentic to us and designed simply to prove that we belong is not the same as genuine belonging. Finally, I will explain how my analysis sheds light on why belonging is a human need and how harmful social exclusion can be, especially when it is systemic as it is with oppression (e.g., racism or transphobia). The theory I present will be part of a moral philosophy of belonging that I hope to develop, which will discuss not only what belonging is, but what responsibilities individuals, groups, or institutions have for fostering our belonging.

Travis Leicher, Department of Political Studies, Queen’s University
“Constructing Social Harm”

This paper develops what I term the “social construction of hate,” referring to prominent arguments sympathetic to hate speech legislation which rely on a conception of harm rooted in subjective social experience. Language makes socialization possible, thus language necessarily gives shape to our social reality and self-perception. If speech shapes self-understanding and the understanding of others, thereby possessing a relational character, it may follow that speech ought to be restricted to guide identity formation and protect the social processes within

which identity formation occurs. Existing literature defending hate speech legislation combines constitutive and consequential harms that arise from understanding speech as relational. Yet, when accounting for existing laws governing incitement to violence, harassment, slander, and other consequentialist harms, the remaining harm becomes more difficult to identify and measure because of its subjective manifestation. Therefore, I argue that we should seek to clarify the meaning and scope of relational social harm by distinguishing it from the concrete harms that existing laws already address. What remains is a constitutive social harm that is theoretically and empirically elusive, but also conflicts with the structure of liberal democratic values that accords fundamental liberties priority over certain considerations of equality. Once the harms that are addressed through existing legislation are distinguished from this residual category of constitutive harm, the case for expanding speech restrictions becomes redundant, as existing legislation already protects against harms that legitimately warrant restriction. A more pragmatic philosophical framework surrounding hate speech should therefore distinguish between harms that existing law can already address through hate-independent means and those that depend on a distinct and contestable conception of constitutive social harm. Once this distinction is made, the harms attributed to hate speech in the latter case provide insufficient grounds for expanding restrictions on speech and may even warrant reconsideration of existing legal restrictions.

Letitia Meynell, Philosophy Department, Dalhousie University
“Okruhlik’s Unassailable Heuristics and a Call Better Brain Science”

In this presentation I will explore two important ideas developed the work of feminist philosopher of science, Kathleen Okruhlik—what I will call the Garbage In, Garbage Out Thesis and the Auxilliary (Ethical) Motive Thesis. These are not so much principles lying at the foundations of scientific epistemology, but insights grounding unassailable heuristics. Although, as I will explain, they are conservative—consistent with what almost all working scientists and philosophers of science would concede—I will show that they have radical implications for the practice of science. If scientists are committed to avoiding noxious prejudices that distort their knowledge claims, pollute their methods and interpretive practices,

and often reify and support injustice, then they should employ these heuristics. Having rehearsed Okruhlik's arguments for these theses, I will explore them further with a case study—the neuroscientific study of sex differences. I will conclude the paper with some reflections on the urgency of having these kinds of unassailable heuristics inform the sciences, particularly in the current political context when both science and feminism are under attack.

Robbie Moser, Department of Philosophy, Mount Allison University
“AI, Truth and History”

With the expansion of generative-AI and the diminishing trust in institutions, Policy Horizons Canada has forecasted a social disruption in which people can't tell what's true and false. In this situation, our sense of the present loses its coherence and with it goes our ability to talk meaningfully about history. This is because AI not only generatively alters and revises the present to suit the demands of its users, but as the technology integrates with our digital repositories, and as we increasingly cede control of our information ecosystems, AI also generatively alters and revises our conceptual access to the past. displays the specific vulnerability being exploited by generative AI: human experience is open to changing conceptions and competing redescriptions of its contents, and at the same time, humans require trusted communities to achieve objective knowledge. I present this vulnerability in terms of what Regina Rini calls an “epistemic backstop crisis” and what Jonathan Lear calls ‘loss of a form of life.’ This is because in losing shared criteria for settling truths about our histories, we lose the ability to constitute our selves. Following suggestions by Lear and by Louise Arbour, I propose a reconstruction of a conception of truth as shared space. The reconstruction preserves a human need for sense-making projects of self-creation, and suggests a role for the historian in these projects after squarely facing the epistemic losses of the present.

Martina Orlandi, Philosophy Department, Trent University

“Smooth seas don’t make skillful sailors” In defense of the Challenges that A.I. Eases

This paper examines the question of whether the challenges that LLMs can ease are beneficial to individuals’ well-being. Some of the most foundational activities and experiences that permeate human life require effort and can generate negative feelings. Employing critical thinking is mentally taxing, navigating interpersonal dynamics is often emotionally draining, and overcoming grief is associated with pain and mortality.

LLMs can circumvent all these challenges. Griefbots can ease the pain of facing the loss of a loved one and chatbots can outsource critical thinking, as well as replace friends, partners, therapists, offering relationships that have been called “frictionless” and “sycophantic” (Zohar, E., Bloom, P., & Inzlicht, in press). It may seem reasonable to suggest that easing these challenges is adaptive for individuals, but in this paper I suggest that the risks of alleviating certain kinds of struggles invite caution.

I argue that an effortless emotional life does not necessarily yield to a better life because LLMs circumvent challenges that are beneficial for individuals’ well-being. In particular, I focus on what I take to be three paradigmatic cases of beneficial challenges: i) the challenges of navigating interpersonal relationships, ii) the challenges of employing critical thinking, and iii) the challenges of grieving the loss of a loved one.

My argument is twofold. I first advance a *consequentialist* defense of challenges that, drawing on recent empirical research, shows how some challenges are adaptive. The challenges caused by employing critical thinking and particularly the frustration that stems from corrective feedback can enhance learning; the challenges that derive from navigating interpersonal relationships and overcoming the loss of a loved one can instead contribute to individual growth (Zohar, E., Bloom, P., & Inzlicht, in press).

Second, I offer a *non-consequentialist* defense of challenges that suggests that struggles are valuable for their own sake. This second argument advances two claims: the first is empirically informed and the second one is conceptual.

Empirically, I argue that psychological research on effort shows that at least sometimes individuals are drawn to effortful activities independently from their outcome – which suggests that we value effort for its own sake (Inzlicht et al. 2018). Conceptually, a non-consequentialist defense of challenges relies on a defense of the negative feelings they often generate. Here I suggest that our desire to avoid challenges is due to our desire to shield ourselves from experiencing negative emotions. However, building on recent work from Krista Thomason, I argue that negative feelings play an important role in human life that goes beyond whether they can be productive (Thomason 2023). Negative feelings enrich human life, and they are part of the way humans experience the world. Circumventing them the way LLMs do by providing already made reasonings, frictionless friendships, and illusory griefbots eliminates a peculiarly human aspect of our life which would be, as a result, impoverished and meaningless.

Zoe Phillips, Schulich School of Law, Dalhousie University
“Can Artificial Intelligence Generate Art?”

One of humanity’s oldest mysteries is the source of artistic ideas and what, exactly, is being manifested through art. This paper argues that artificial intelligence can generate art, but that accepting this conclusion requires us to reconsider the relationship between artistic expression and the individual artist.

Throughout Plato’s work, artists are treated with both skepticism and fascination. They are sometimes dismissed as meddlers, proficient only in a *techné*, yet Plato is repeatedly struck by their ability to produce what they cannot account for. In the *Apology* and *Ion*, poets create meaningful works without being able to explain the source of the knowledge or insight they contain. In the *Meno*, Plato similarly suggests that a person may arrive at truth without conscious understanding, perhaps through divine inspiration. These works leave open the possibility that artistic insight can manifest through an individual without being consciously produced by them.

At the same time, Plato’s fascination with artistic inspiration is matched by a deep suspicion of art as imitation. In the *Republic*, artistic representation is distanced from the truth: the Forms are eternal, people produce objects from them, and artists

reproduce those objects again. Art can therefore imitate knowledge or authority without possessing either.

Generative AI intensifies these Platonic problems. AI produces without conscious understanding, through imitation, recombination, and inherited cultural material. I will argue that these qualities do not necessarily disqualify AI-generated works from being art, because Plato already allows artistic production to be separated from both knowledge and full conscious understanding. AI therefore challenges the assumption that artistic creation must belong entirely to a conscious individual and, in the context of freedom of expression, complicates the idea that meaningful expression must originate in a conscious human mind.

Nicole Ramsoomair, Philosophy Department, Dalhousie University
“Looking Upward: Vertical Identification and the Eclipse of the Public”

During the September 2024 U.S. presidential debate, Donald Trump claimed that Haitian immigrants in Springfield, Ohio, were eating pets. When the moderator relayed the city manager’s correction, Trump appealed instead to television reports. The episode is usually understood as an example of political misinformation. This paper argues that its democratic significance runs deeper. Trump’s allegation transformed a complex local situation involving migration, labour demand, housing pressure, and public-service strain into a racialized drama organized around Trump. Residents and officials could still speak, but largely as witnesses for or against Trump’s credibility, rather than as participants capable of defining the situation itself.

I develop the concept of vertical identification to describe this displacement. Vertical identification arises when attachment to a visible interpreter becomes the principal means through which an affected public is understood, weakening the standing of those affected to describe, challenge, and revise that account. Reading Walter Lippmann and John Dewey as theorists of democratic mediation, I distinguish interpretive power, justified authority, and representational standing. Lippmann explains why citizens confronting complex and distant affairs depend on attention-economizing signs and intermediaries. Dewey provides the democratic standard for evaluating them: whether mediation connects situated experience,

specialized inquiry, and institutions capable of response. Digital platforms disrupt these relations by ranking speakers, converting reaction into data, and repeatedly centring figures who condense complex conditions into emotionally portable scenes.

Against the upward orientation exemplified by the Springfield controversy, I propose horizontal identification: a relation in which differently situated people recognize a connected problem, preserve one another's standing to contest its meaning, and direct claims toward answerable institutions. The central democratic question is therefore not only whether citizens can speak or whether their claims are true, but whether public communication leaves them with a figure to follow or a situation they can investigate together.

Matthew Robinson, Department of Philosophy, St. Thomas University
“Agent Intellect in the Latin Tradition: St. Bonaventure’s Dominican Source”

This paper evaluates several possible Latin sources for Bonaventure's interpretation of the agent intellect, as presented in his Sentence Commentary. The paper suggests that Albert the Great's *De Homine* is the most likely proximate source both because of the striking conceptual similarity that Bonaventure's account bears to Albert's and because both accounts take seriously and are oriented as responses to William of Auvergne's distinctive charge that the Peripatetic account of the agent intellect is incompatible with a robust concept of the individual self. The paper reaches this conclusion by reviewing earlier Franciscan interpretations of the agent intellect in the *Summa de Anima* by Jean of La Rochelle, and in book two of the *Summa Fratris Alexandri*, and then by comparing these accounts of the agent intellect with Albert's account.

Mathieu Sauvé, Philosophy Department, Saint Mary's University
“Moral Skepticism And The Academic Citizen”

The moral goodness of academic freedom is split between two approaches. One is a collectivist approach which values academic freedom as a function of democracy and that the moral goodness of academic freedom is conditional upon how well it

serves the purpose of common good. The second approach is individualist in nature and values academic freedom as a function of personal satisfaction and private reward. While each valuation is not strictly incompatible with one another, it is the case that one approach to valuing academic freedom will provide a more effective method for educating students to the significance of academic freedom itself. This paper elaborates on reasoning in support of an individualist approach to understanding academic freedom. Firstly, the works of Immanuel Kant are examined to sketch out a rudimentary scheme to why academic freedom cannot purely be a collectivist practice. Kant's ideas of an 'unrestricted moral sensibility,' 'the character of the child,' 'the character of the citizen,' and 'good with/without qualifications' are analyzed as confirming of an individualist valuation of academic freedom. However it is found that a Kantian notion of 'human dignity' is too flawed to properly educate about the importance of academic freedom. Friedrich Nietzsche's strong individualistic values inform his theory of 'herd morality.' In applying herd morality to human dignity it is found that a Kantian unrestricted moral sensibility can be achieved through a method of oscillation between the Kantian *Child* and *Citizen*. Nietzschean 'moral skepticism' is revealed as an effective method to protect academic freedoms through a strategy of confirming self-identity by preserving one's scholastic community. One who is strategically trained in this way is called an 'academic citizen.'

Matthew Scarfone, Department of Philosophy, University of Toronto
"Pronoun Preferences and Limits of Speech"

I examine a particular ethical limit of speech by asking when someone may legitimately refuse another person's preferred form of address. In doing so, I add to debates about freedom of expression by distinguishing between, on the one hand, impermissible speech such as misgendering, and, on the other, instances where speakers may justifiably resist forms of address that would implicate them in unwanted relationships.

To make this argument I draw on two hypothetical cases. In the first, Colleague, Alex prefers to be addressed using she/her pronouns. Alex's colleague Brad does not feel comfortable using these pronouns to refer to Alex, so Brad instead refers to Alex with he/him pronouns. In the second case, Stepmom, Chantal is newly

married and prefers that her husband's daughter Diane refer to her as Mom. Diane does not feel comfortable using this proper noun to refer to Chantal, so Diane instead refers to her as Chantal.

Both cases involve refusing to use another person's preferred form of address. I argue that Brad's refusal is not justified, but Diane's refusal is justified. First, Brad has a negative duty not to misgender Alex, but does not have a positive duty to use she/her pronouns. Second, Diane does not have a positive duty to call Chantal Mom, but she also does not have a negative duty not to call her Chantal. Satisfying Chantal's request would implicate Diane in a particular relationship with Chantal. It is this implication that provides Diane with the grounds for justifiably refusing Chantal's preferred form of address. In Colleague, Alex's preferred form of address does not implicate Brad into any relationship with her, so Brad lacks the grounds to justify misgendering Alex.

Matthew Silk, Philosophy Department, Mount Allison University
"The AI Fallacy"

Despite its sudden public importance, the study of the ethics of AI is relatively new. Identification of both the scope of the field and of relevant tools, methods, and skills of study remain an outstanding endeavor. For example, when does the use of AI constitute a genuinely distinctive ethical problem, and when does it represent a new instance of a more general ethical problem associated with science and technology? To partially define the scope of the field and offer tools of critical thinking within it, I will articulate what I call the "AI fallacy."

The AI fallacy occurs when a person makes a moral distinction between an AI application and a comparable non-AI application without being able to identify a morally relevant difference between the two. For example, someone might regard an AI-generated output as ethically objectionable while regarding an equivalent human-generated output as unobjectionable yet be unable to identify any feature of the AI application that could justify the distinction. The fallacy therefore consists not in believing that AI can never generate novel ethical problems, but in treating the mere involvement of AI as morally significant without establishing why it is significant. When this occurs, it can produce unjustified double standards in the

evaluation of AI technologies and skew how we evaluate scope and context when reasoning about such cases.

I will outline several case studies involving healthcare, training and learning, and information and media communication where this fallacy tends to arise and will use those case studies to evaluate when it makes sense to understand AI-related issues as morally unique ethical problems and when it makes more sense to understand the scope of ethical problems involving AI as larger ethical problems arising from the application of science and technology. This can help us understand when analogues and historical case studies are useful to the study of the ethics of AI and when they are not.

Robert J. Stainton (Western University), Arthur Sullivan (Memorial University) and Christopher D. Viger (Western University)
“Languages As Metaphysical Hybrids”

Our topic is the metaphysics of language: What kind of thing is a natural language? For instance, to what ontological category do English, Turkish and Urdu belong? Traditionally, work on such questions tends to fall into four different categories, which we call Platonism, Physicalism, Mentalism, and Eliminativism. In previous work, we have argued against all four of these orientations – each of them may well be motivated by something that needs to be accommodated, but none of them per se can be the full, correct story of the metaphysics of language. Instead, we have argued, languages are Metaphysical Hybrids.

The aim of this talk is to develop our positive view in more detail: to spell out a hybrid-admitting metaphysics, and its specific application to languages. A very important step will be to distinguish senses of ‘physical’, ‘mental’, and ‘abstract’. On one set of senses, it really isn’t possible for something to belong to all three categories: nothing can be simultaneously located, for example, in the external physical environment, within an individual mind, and outside space and time. When language theorists react against a hybrid approach, it may be because they are construing the terms ‘physical’, ‘mental’ and ‘abstract’ in such old-fashioned, rigid, ways. So understood, the point is well taken: nothing really can be just like a rock, just like a tickle sensation and just like square root of seven. The three

procrustean terms admit of other senses as well, however: to give an example, an entity can be 'mental' in the sense of being individuated with reference to mental states yet located not "inside the mind" (but rather in the physical world); and it can be abstract in not having a specific location or shape, while not being outside space/time either.

Now, our human world is replete with such Metaphysical Hybrids. The sweet red Gala apple – a species of fruit – is precisely a case in point. There are many, many more: the McDonalds corporation, the tune Chopsticks, the discipline of Linguistics, and so forth. Our position will be that when 'physical', 'mental' and 'abstract' are construed in the right way, it becomes unsurprising that English, Turkish and Urdu fall under all three.

Noah Stemeroff, Department of Philosophy, University of Bristol

"Who is afraid of a little mysticism? Non-hegemonic knowledge and philosophical discourse within mid-20th-century theoretical physics"

It is typically claimed that there is no place for religion or 'speculative' philosophy in modern science. The empirical methodology of the physical sciences is thought to be the only viable avenue for the pursuit of genuine knowledge concerning the natural world. The long and rich history of religious and 'speculative' thought in the development of modern science is often told as a cautionary tale. It is a story of misguided beliefs, or superstitions, which led to false intuitions.

In this story, the paragons of 20th-century theoretical physics are held up as the embodiment of the empirical methodology of modern science. In particular, the architects of quantum mechanics are taken to have banished the last vestiges of 'intuition' in the foundations of physics. However, this story is far from the actual facts. By the end of the 1920s, the founders of quantum mechanics had settled on a basic formulation of quantum theory, but one which they considered to be incomplete, as vast domains of physics, and human existence, remained unexplained. In the search for new ideas, these physicists did not renounce forms of 'speculative' philosophy (such as Platonism and mysticism). Rather, it was these fields that physicists, such as Wolfgang Pauli and Werner Heisenberg, thought might contain the greatest promise for novel insight.

This paper will provide an overview of Pauli and Heisenberg's later 'speculative' philosophy and the struggle they faced in their attempt to communicate their non-hegemonic studies within the mid-20th-century scientific community (including in the early foundations of a quantum biology). This study will address the shifting boundaries between philosophy and science, and also between hegemonic and non-hegemonic forms of thought in this period. To conclude, the paper will explore the implications of this work for our contemporary understanding of the norms of scientific discourse.

Christopher Thomson, Philosophy Department, Acadia University

"Is the College Essay Really Dead?"

Stephen Marche's sensationally declensionist 2022 article, "The College Essay Is Dead," appears to have served as a catalyst for an ongoing debate regarding the role and use of large language models (LLMs) within education—particularly higher education. The open accessibility of LLM-based resources, combined with their increasing capacity to generate high-quality text, has allowed many individuals to offload much, if not all, of their academic writing to models that generate work in an opaque and largely undetectable manner. This dynamic raises significant concerns regarding academic integrity and freedom. Standard review procedures are now widely considered outdated (such as Turnitin) or ill-prepared to handle this challenge (e.g., relying on increased vigilance from critical readers). Although proposed solutions have been both varied and creative, the concern remains that given the rapid advancement of this technology, such efforts may already be too little, too late. In this essay, I wish to explore several proposed strategies for preserving the viability of the academic essay and critically evaluate their prospects for success.

Sarah Turnbull, Department of Philosophy, McGill University

“Responding to Danaher: Against the Distribution of Sexual Experiences”

“Women have always been the canaries in the coal mines, quietly singing. But we are so used to seeing them die at men’s hands, so used to justifying and excusing it as normal or “understandable,” that it wouldn’t occur to us to consider this enough of an aberration to raise alarm.” – Laura Bates, *Men Who Hate Women*

Are the harms of sexual exclusion a serious problem? If so, what obligation, if any, do we have to ameliorate the harms of those who are sexually excluded? On one hand, philosophers like Amia Srinivasan argue that sexual exclusion is not a serious political problem and moreover that there is no right to sexual inclusion (Srinivasan 2018). While Srinivasan’s arguments are favoured by those in the feminist camp, others want to stress the political gravity of sexual exclusion and defend arguments in favour of sexual inclusion. In this camp, John Danaher argues that sexual exclusion is a serious political problem and furthermore suggests principles of distributive justice can correct for this (Danaher 2020). Given the obvious tension between either side of the discussion, should we favour the feminist camp? Or does a defence of sexual inclusion have political merits that can orient us towards a more just society? This paper takes up Danaher’s argument and expresses two distinct worries: (1) meaningful sexual experiences cannot be a distributive good; and (2) even if we entertain that meaningful sexual experiences are a distributive good, doing so creates unique injustices and adverse downstream consequences that are simply far too grave to ignore. Entertaining Danaher’s premise leads to an absurd conclusion. This paper will proceed in three steps. First, to get clear on what Danaher is arguing for, I will provide a reconstruction of his arguments. Next, I will take issue with Danaher’s specific premise that “[meaningful] sexual experience can be (and ought to be) treated as a distributive good, i.e., as something that people should be able to experience as part of a well lived life...” (Danaher 2020). I will show how Danaher makes a gross categorical error and furthermore that acceptance of this premise leads to absurd consequences. Finally, I will conclude with a brief objection to my argument against Danaher’s position. In doing so, I will ask, and provide a plausible answer, to the following: if sexual inclusion cannot be treated as a distributive good, and furthermore subject to principles of distributive justice, what role, if any, does sexual inclusion have in society?

G. Tymowski-Gionet, Faculty of Kinesiology, University of New Brunswick
“Autonomy and consent in sport with animals: The imposition of pain and suffering on others”

Sport has long been associated with suffering. Athletes voluntarily endure exhaustion, pain, deprivation, injury, and risk in pursuit of excellence, meaning, and self-knowledge. In endurance and high-risk sports, suffering may be understood not simply as an unfortunate consequence of participation but as constitutive of the sporting experience itself. Drawing upon philosophical accounts of autonomy, suffering, and flourishing, this work examines the ethical distinction between suffering experienced by consenting human athletes and that imposed upon non-human animals in sport.

For autonomous adults, suffering chosen on a voluntary basis may possess transformative value. Athletes may knowingly accept pain and risk, test physical and psychological limits, confront vulnerability and mortality, and derive self-understanding or transcendence from these experiences. Such suffering may contribute to flourishing because individuals possess the capacity to understand, choose, refuse, and assign meaning to it.

Such justification weakens when meaningful autonomy is absent. Children’s burgeoning capacity to consent complicates claims that athletic suffering is freely chosen and raises particular ethical concerns when they cannot provide meaningful consent. The distinction is even sharper for non-human animals used in sport, who may experience exertion, fear, injury, pain, distress, and death. These experiences are imposed upon them without their consent, and animals cannot assign them the transformative meaning that humans may derive such suffering in sport.

This paper argues that the moral permissibility of suffering in sport depends upon who suffers, whether suffering is freely chosen, and for whose purposes it is endured. Suffering may acquire meaning when autonomously embraced by the sufferer; suffering imposed upon another is not justified by the meaning, pleasure, tradition, or profit it may provide to others.

Mark Vopat, Y Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Youngstown State University

“Cognitive Debt, Persistence, and Dependence: Some Moral Concerns Over the Rapid Adoption of AI”

In the past year there has been an increasing call to incorporate AI into all levels of education. In April of 2025 U.S. President Trump signed an Executive Order: "Advancing Artificial Intelligence Education for American Youth" which calls for AI literacy in K–12 classrooms. Following the lead of the Federal Government, several U.S. state legislators have been pushing to incorporate AI into postsecondary education as well.

The push to incorporate AI literacy into the classroom stems from the prevailing idea that facility with these tools will be necessary for gainful employment post graduation. This view seems be based less from the actual adoption of AI in the private sector, than it does on in the promotion of large language models (LLMs) by the companies that created them.

While AI is undeniably a powerful tool, the call for the widespread adoption of this tool is morally problematic. Like most tools (and most technological advances) there are the inevitable trade-offs that occur with their adoption.* The first is the mounting evidence pointing to the negative psychological impacts of AI use. This includes cognitive debt, metacognitive laziness, and the erosion of persistence or grit. These psychological impacts suggest a second concern, namely, that a type of cognitive dependence develops which results in a decrease of one's autonomy. This loss of autonomy results in a potential for domination by those controlling access to AI systems. In this paper I argue that given the potential psychological and moral harms posed by AI, we should both refrain from its unconstrained use in the classroom and broaden our concern to issues of accessibility.

* I suspect most of us are familiar with negative impact on water supply, land use, noise, energy consumption, pollution, theft of intellectual property, and worker displacement.

Johannes Wheeldon, Law and Society, Acadia University

“Controversy as Pedagogy: Three Questions about Deliberative Debate and Moral Philosophy”

Simon Lambek (2024) recently explored the role and value of public debate in Canada and argued debates serve to represent a spectrum of opinions and thus shape how people view an issue. However, public opinion polls suggest Canadians are concerned about the quality and substance of public debate. They describe debates as “superficial and one-sided,” and believe that few politicians do a “good job debating.” In my own work, I have sought to resurrect classroom debate in ways that root controversial topics in foundational theories of justice, including utilitarian, libertarianism, egalitarianism, and virtue ethics. A focus on debate can address diverse pedagogical interests and build the capacity to better assess political claims. This requires carefully drawing distinctions between arguments of fact, value and policy to detangle emotional appeals from empirical claims. By exploring controversial issues in Canada including the legalization of cannabis, Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD), race and sentencing, and the right to vote in prison, students are assigned teams and a side of a debate. Working in small groups they produce debate speech drafts rooted in one or more foundational views of justice. Deliberative, Debate and Dialogue (DDD), as a model, modifies debate away from some problematic practices and toward deliberative models rooted in mutual respect and shared norms. In this paper I present the DDD model, provide arguments made by students on controversial topics, and consider some essential philosophical enquiries. These are related to the epistemic value of provisionality and incrementalism, recasting the fact/value distinction, and assessing the role of perspective taking in moral philosophy.

Anna Wilks, Philosophy Department Acadia University

“The Worst Possible Mistake for the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence”

While some are prepared to acknowledge the status of *legal* personhood of exceptionally sophisticated robotic beings, few would endorse the attribution of *full* personhood to such beings. It is argued that select types of robotic beings ought to be considered persons for the purpose of holding them legally accountable for their actions. I argue, however, that these purely utilitarian grounds may not be

sufficient for some highly advanced *future* robotic beings. This has potentially serious consequences.

The worst possible ethical mistake is to fail to acknowledge a person *as* a person. In the ethics of artificial intelligence, the single most important objective is to avoid the mistake of not acknowledging the personhood of robotic persons. The problem is that guarding against this *ethical* mistake renders us vulnerable to the *epistemic* mistake of falsely attributing personhood to robotic beings that are *not* genuine persons. This is the most profound dilemma with which the advancement of artificial intelligence presents us.

This paper tackles the problem of assessing robotic personhood by working within a Kantian ethical framework (Wood 1998, Longuenesse 2017) and merging this framework with a qualified functionalist account of *persons* (Thompson 2007, Block 2015, Hinton 2015, Schlicht 2022, Kim 2022, Gunkel 2024). The notion of personhood that emerges is helpful for specifying the criteria for robotic personhood, the challenges that must be surmounted to validate the attribution of personhood to certain robotic beings, and the risks of getting these attributions wrong.

Bernard Wills, Memorial University

“What IS a Soldier Exactly? Plato on What Makes a Warrior”

In the second and third books of the Republic Plato describes the aesthetic education of a soldier. Given that there are wars how are we to form that class of citizens we call ‘guardians’? One aspect of this discussion I would like emphasize is that Plato has a clear-headed understanding of what war is and what is required if we are going to assign people to fight them. He even has an understanding of how warfare emerges from the backdrop of ‘the state of nature’ pertinent to whether we are doomed by ‘biology’ to fight. Understanding how and why we create warriors also elicits the question we as a species now face. Can we create a world where they are no longer necessary?

Wanlu Yu, Philosophy Department, Memorial University

“Creative Freedom – Does it Still Belong Entirely to Humans in The Age of AI?—A Phenomenological Critical Perspective”

From instrumental rationality to the essence of technology, industrialization has consistently reduced humans to a kind of “function,” quantifying and breaking down human capabilities, and now with AI can easily create art and academic papers, we need to think about whether creative freedom is still in the hands of scholars.

Academic writing, especially philosophical writing, seems to be not just for scholars anymore. It has become a process that can be measured in terms of workload. Heidegger's criticism of the term "Gestell" is particularly relevant today. Modern technology is not just a tool; but a way of changing anything into something that can be measured. And within this framework, does people remember there are ways that can't be calculated?

Phenomenology explains the more essential connections between concepts, and provides AI with rigorous criteria for evaluation: it must be open to the world and connected to others—criteria that are deeply rooted in the lived experience of each and every one of us, yet this is something algorithm cannot evaluate.

The emergence of AI is gradually separating people from their abilities and from their very being, it is at this moment that true “humanity” and human freedom come to the fore. This is not a matter of running machines, but rather a philosophical question: When a person has nothing to do, how will they face themselves? While Merleau-Ponty posits that freedom consists in reopening new possibilities within a lived situation, starting from the premise that the body is already living in the world. As Heidegger put it: “Full of merit, yet poetically, man dwells on this earth.”