

Philosophy Conference
University of Patras, Philosophy Department
4-5 June, 2015

**Ethical and Political Intentionality; The Individual and the Collective from Plato
to Hobbes and onwards**

Abstracts

Hans Bernhard Schmid

“Aristotle on Joint Activity, Plural Self-Awareness, and Common Sense”

According to Aristotle, our ultimate purpose in life is to be well, and well-being is in virtuous action over a lifetime. While the concepts of well-being and virtue are subject to heated controversies in the received literature, most interpretations tacitly assume a distributive reading of Aristotle’s basic claim. In this reading, well-being is what each of us wants in his or her own life, and it is in the agent’s own virtuous action over his or her own lifetime. A distributive reading can easily accommodate other-regarding and impartial attitudes, as well as the view that no agent can be truly well without the well-being of those with whom he or she lives together. However, no distributive reading can accommodate the view that agents who live closely together in egalitarian relations participate in each other’s well-being in such a way that one agent’s well-being is, in parts, also another’s. In his analysis of virtuous friendship, however, Aristotle points towards such a participatory view. It has been claimed repeatedly in the received literature that any such view has unacceptable consequences, as it extends the subject of well-being in a way that ignores the basic separateness of persons. Taking another person’s well-being to be one’s own seems to disrespect the other person’s own agency. The core claim of this paper is that these passages should be reconstructed as suggesting a collective reading of Aristotle’s basic view that complements rather than replaces the distributive view. In this collective reading, what we jointly want to do in our shared life is to be well together, and that being well together is in virtuous joint activity over the time of living together. It is argued that Aristotle’s participatory conception of well-being does not undermine the participants’ own agency as it is in their common sense of action that they are unified to a plural subject of well-being. Common sense of joint action is the participants’ plural pre-reflective self-awareness of their action as theirs, collectively. The extension of the subject of well-being to we-groups broadens our view on how well-being is subjective or first-personal and opens up a plural perspective on the good.

Christos Doukos

"Learning, Acquired Dispositions and Practices"

Could we claim that participation in a social practice involves a distinctive kind of knowledge? And how are we to understand this claim? I shall approach these questions by focusing on a distinction between two senses of 'learning to' ascriptions. A 'learning to' ascription might either attribute the acquisition of knowing-how, or -what we may call- *habitual* learning. On the latter reading a 'learning to' ascription (a) entails a corresponding habitual ascription, and (b) implies that the relevant disposition -or habit- has some positive value. I shall argue that habitual knowledge does not fit into a Humean distinction between motivational and cognitive states. Then I shall suggest that practices provide a central context in which ascriptions of habitual knowledge are called for.

Kim Frost

"Indifference to Origins"

In "What is it to Wrong Someone?" Michael Thompson notes that practices may be qualitatively identical and yet *distinct* because of their different origins. This means that some social possibilities of thought and action are blocked because of accidents of origin. For example, suppose there are two people, each of whom was brought up in a distinct practice, but where the relevant practices are qualitatively identical. At least whilst they are unaware of their different origins, these two cannot converse with each other in a common language, or exchange testimonial knowledge, or conduct a contract, or (in some cases) think the same thought, despite the qualitative identity in what they do and think whilst attempting to do these things with each other. The reason is that their apparent agreement with each other in such cases is an *accident*, and when two folk converse in a common language, or exchange testimonial knowledge, etc., it cannot be an accident that they agree in what they think and do in attempting to do such things.

Thompson uses this metaphysical point about the individuation of practices to articulate a deep and difficult puzzle about what it is to wrong someone. My concern is not directly with the puzzle about the nature of justice but with the prior metaphysical point about the individuation of practices. I am suspicious of metaphysical administration: I think it can go overboard and blind us to possibilities. I argue that whether or not the relevant social possibilities of thought and action are blocked depends on whether the practices involved exhibit "indifference to origins" or not. Explaining what I mean by "indifference to origins" is the task of the paper. As a rough approximation: a practice exhibits indifference to origins when it explicitly or implicitly declares acts to fall under it when the act exhibits the right

spirit, regardless of the accidents of origins that historically led up to acts of that kind exhibiting that spirit. Practices that exhibit indifference to origins are, in a special sense, *voracious*: they swallow up acts with extremely diverse origins, and count them as acts under the one practice, in a way that pays little attention to many forms of (fussy) metaphysical administration.

If my line of thought is on the right track, then this opens up some interesting possibilities for thinking of intentionality – both individual and collective – as a kind of power of thought one usually acquires during one's initiation into a social practice of reason giving. The kind of power of thought one acquires (or simply: has) need *not* be specific to any particular practice, if a practice exists that exhibits a relevant mode of indifference to origins. I will close the paper by trying to illustrate some of these possibilities with the (bizarre, limiting) Swampman case drawn from traditional analytic philosophy of mind literature. As I am fumbling in the dark a bit, I will argue through examples, and let the deep structure emerge as it will. This method is not the quickest or most informative, but at least I think it will be clearer where there are problems with my line of thought.

Alexandra Newton

“On the Difference between Reason and Life”

According to an old and venerable tradition, what distinguishes human beings from other forms of life is that we are rational; the form of human life is reason, a faculty for knowledge, which both distinguishes us from the other animals and constitutes the kind of animal we are. As the idea of a ‘form of life’ is sometimes understood, reason is our ‘manner of living’, or the distinctive *way* in which we are animals. Aristotle says that the horse is an animal in a distinctive, horse-like manner; similarly, the assumption is, reason performs animal activities in a distinctive, rational manner. The horse lives by engaging in the kinds of activities characteristic of horses (feeding on grass, roaming the fields, rollicking with other horses). By contrast, we live by engaging in rational activities: e.g. activities of conversing with others, of learning, and of thinking both about what is and about what ought to be. However, is it clear that reason is a way of living a life, as these (neo-)Aristotelian views of reason’s role assume? Is it obvious that conversing and thinking, or more generally, conceiving, judging and inferring, are activities or functions of living, just as digestion and desire and (arguably) perception are? What I want to do here is to argue, with Kant, that this is not obvious. There is an important difference between the ‘form’ and ‘functions’ that characterize reason as such, and the ‘life-form’ and ‘functions’ that belong to what Kant calls a ‘natural end’ or organism. Reason cannot be or become a life-form in the latter sense. (Hume does not see this distinction, because he sees no alternative to the idea that reason is a naturalized life-form.)

This is not to say that there is no sense in which reason can become a life-form. We can distinguish the above sense of ‘form’, which corresponds to the Aristotelian idea of a ‘species’

or kind (e.g. of living), from the notion of 'form' as ground or source of 'determination' (e.g. of life). (This corresponds to Aristotle's distinction between 'secondary substance' or species and 'primary substance' as 'cause of being' and 'essence' in the individual.) Although reasoning doesn't constitute a kind of life or manner of living, it does determine how we live (and die). That is, rational activities are not themselves (kinds of) activities of living, but they do inform concrete life activities, and even make life (and death) for us humans possible. Thus, reasoning is not a kind of living, but human living is a kind of reasoning.

Acknowledging this difference will have important consequences for how we think about life in community with other rational beings. The idea of a community is essential to that of an organic life-form; organisms live in community with others of their own kind. By contrast, I'll argue that reason is universal in its employment, and does not, as such, distinguish its employment in me from its employment in you. There is no notion of a community of individual reasoners internal to reason. It is only when we begin to think about reason's use of the organism, or about the way it determines both sensory perception and desire, that the individual and its community come into view. The relation between universal, individual and community is broken: we are, in some sense, distanced from ourselves as individuals, and from the communities we live in. Yet at the same time we are also closer to ourselves and to other rational beings than the beasts can ever be towards themselves or towards members of their kind, because universal reason is purely formal and indifferent to differences among individuals. So the life of human animals is difficult in a way that non-rational animality is not: we are torn between community and isolation, and find ourselves in what Kant calls an eternal conflict of 'unsociable sociability'. This is an intolerable situation, but it is not one we can avoid if we acknowledge Kant's distinction between reason and life, as I argue we must.

Sara Chant

"Freedom and Responsibility in a Hollywood Standoff"

Nearly all recent inquiries into collective moral responsibility worry that if moral responsibility attaches to the collective as such and not simply to the individuals who compose it, then collectives must be distinct moral agents with 'minds of their own.' But this poses a dilemma: either accept the curious existence of collective agents and group minds or reject the possibility of genuinely collective moral responsibility. This paper offers a counterexample to the claim that collective responsibility entails collective agents. I argue that collective moral responsibility does not depend on the metaphysics of collective agents, but instead on the epistemic states of groups.

Jonny Thakkar

“Socialism and Joint Action: A Response to Cohen”

G. A. Cohen's *Why Not Socialism?* revolves around an invitation to imagine a camping trip governed by an egalitarian principle and a principle of community. The egalitarian principle requires us to (a) correct for inequalities resulting from social and innate disadvantage but not for those resulting from preference, regrettable choice and option luck. The principle of community, meanwhile, requires that we (b) curb inequalities (even those permitted by the egalitarian principle) insofar as they impede mutual concern and also that we (c) engage in reciprocal action for the sake of benefiting one another. My paper argues (i) that (c) must be prior to both (a) and (b) and then (ii) goes on to provide an account of what (c) involves. This allows us to offer a better defence of socialism than Cohen was able to provide.

The first point is relatively straightforward. Whatever the principles of equality that we are willing to endorse as regulative principles for our society—be they (what Cohen calls) bourgeois or left-liberal or socialist, or utilitarian for that matter—they will only make sense against the background of a commitment to cooperate with one another for the sake of mutual benefit. Without this commitment, there would be no need for regulative principles except as tools for ensuring stability. To return to the camping analogy, the key decision is to *go camping together*. If we each went camping separately, there would be no need for principles of equality internal to the trip. What this implies, I argue, is that socialism depends on a notion of joint action in something like Margaret Gilbert's sense

The second point is more complex. Jason Brennan attacks Cohen for being unfair to “market society”—Cohen allows himself to assume perfect human beings for the sake of envisaging a socialist society, while assuming flawed human beings when he thinks of market society. Put “socialist” individuals in a market society, Brennan argues, and market society comes to seem superior to non-market society on various grounds. This point seems basically right to me, even if it needs more finesse than Brennan gives it. But what it shows, I argue, is that socialism does not depend on banning property or markets, but rather on the basic orientation of citizens' labours. This allows us to distinguish socialism from communism, which neither Cohen nor Brennan do. It also lets us isolate the core questions regarding socialism, which concern the desirability and feasibility of a certain kind of labour.

Georges Faraklas**“Forms of freedom in Hegel”**

Does my freedom end where yours begins, or does it begin where yours begins as well? In Hegel, these two quite different definitions of freedom express two different *forms* of freedom, the economic freedom of private persons and the political freedom of citizens. One is compatible with the other only if their respective domains, *i.e.* economics and politics, are distinguished and, further, if political freedom is the goal to which economic freedom is but a means, *i.e.* if it is the political community that dominates the market, not the other way around. In order to avoid the usual confusion between individual freedom and the freedom of particular interests, we must distinguish between individuality and particularity from a logical point of view. *Individual* freedom is political freedom, meaning that it is located in the political sphere, whereas *particular* freedom is *private* freedom, belonging to the economic sphere.

Jennifer Lockhart**“How We Have Sex: Sexual Practice and The Marriage Puzzle”**

One commonplace view of sexual ethics is that sex can play a role in diverse sexual practices in order to realize a plurality of goods. Many hold that one good among this plurality is the relationship of sexual partners who make a lifelong commitment to one another including sexual exclusivity. As a matter of stipulation, I will call such relationships *marriages*. Marriages present a puzzle for those who wish to view them as good: given certain plausible assumptions about sex (e.g. that sex is pleasurable and that this alone can provide a sufficient reason for sex), marriages don't seem good at all. Marriages seem to require each spouse to forgo valuable experiences, and the only compensation appears to be that the other spouse will suffer the same ill fate (and that the two will so suffer until one of them dies). I'll approach the marriage puzzle by way of a transcendental question: What are the necessary conditions for the possibility of conceiving of marriage as good? I consider several answers to the question, and argue for the troubling conclusion that nothing short of a strict moralism about sex can make sense of marriage as good.