

LOOKING FORWARD IN HOPE AND DESPAIR

Critical Perspectives on Utopia and Dystopia in Philosophy and the Arts

Organized by the Centre for Ethics as Study in Human Value, University of Pardubice, Czech Republic

[Zoom link to conference*](#) | [Ticket to the Moon film**](#) | [Facebook event page](#) | [Centre for Ethics](#)

*Zoom link is active 15 minutes prior to each session. **The film will be available for streaming Tuesday, April 13 - Friday, April 16

Conference Program

Keynote Speakers

Sam Ashenden, Reader in the Politics Department at Birkbeck, University of London

Rastislav Dinić, Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy, at the University of Niš, Serbia

Andreas Hess, Professor in the School of Sociology at University College Dublin

Sven-Olov Wallenstein, Professor of Philosophy at Södertörn University in Stockholm

Schedule *(all times are in Central European Standard Time, CET)*

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 14

First panel 10-12 (moderator: **Vladimir Lukić**)

10:00 – *Critical Utopianism from the Periphery* presented by Wouter Veldman (faculty of philosophy, theology and religious studies at Radboud University in Nijmegen, the Netherlands)

10:30 – *Towards a Wide View of Utopia within Normative Experimentalism* presented by Cedric Braun (University of St. Gallen)

11:00 – *The Role of “Reasonable Hope” in Rawls’ “Realistic Utopia”* presented by Thorben Knobloch (Ruhr-University Bochum, Germany)

11:30 – *Economic Optimism and the Anthropocene: On Nietzsche’s Transformation of Herrmann’s Economy* presented by Sören E. Schuster (Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, Deutschland)

12-14: LUNCH BREAK

Second panel & Keynote 14-16 (moderator: **Aneta Kohoutová**)

14:00 – *The Educational Utopia: Philosophy, Literature, and Educational Practice in the Works of Rousseau, Korczak, and Bernfeld* presented by Efrat Davidov (Ph.D candidate in the department of philosophy, Bar Ilan University, Israel)

14:30 – *The Symposium on Gilead Studies* presented by Eric Wilkinson (McGill University, Canada)

15:00 – **KEYNOTE: Sven-Olov Wallenstein** *Derrida and the Apocalyptic Tone* (moderator: **İrem Güven**)

THURSDAY, APRIL 15

First panel 10-12 (moderator: Patrick Keenan)

10:00 – *On Literature as Oscillation, and Oscillation as Utopian* presented by Erik Lindman Mata (The School of Culture and Education, Södertörn University, SE)

10:30 – *Moving Back as Moving Forward: Jewish Philosophy and the Restorative Messianic Utopia* presented by Piotr Sawczyński (Institute of Political Science and International Relations, Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland)

11:00 – *Are We Looking Forward? Utopia and Dystopia as a Mirror of the Present Society* presented by Šárka Lojdová (Department of Aesthetics, Charles University, Czech Republic)

11:30 – *An Aesthetics of Atonal Music Between Utopia and Dystopia* presented by Klára Kedvika Muhlová (Institute of Musicology, Masaryk university, Czech Republic)

12-14: LUNCH BREAK

Second panel & Keynote 14-16 (moderator: Lyra Koli)

14:00 – *Access & Excess: Queering and Crippling Towards Pervtopia* presented by Balam Nedim Kenter (Center for Interdisciplinary Studies in Society and Culture, Concordia University, Montréal)

14:30 – *'No Future' For Queers: An Investigation into Pregnancy and Queer Joy as Utopia* presented by Cathrin Fischer (University College Dublin)

15:00 – **KEYNOTE: Rastislav Dinić** *What is Realist in Capitalist Realism* (moderator: Vladimir Lukić)

17:00 – **SPECIAL EVENT:** A discussion of the documentary film **Ticket to the Moon** with the director **Veronika Janatková** (moderator: Aneta Kohoutová)

FRIDAY, APRIL 16

First panel 10-12 (moderator: Diana Kalášková)

10:00 – *Relational Value in Environmental Ethics and Animal Ethics* presented by Yunjie Zhang (PhD candidate, Department of Philosophy, Glasgow University, UK)

10:30 – *The Minor Utopia of the US Disability Rights Struggle: Drawing on the Resources of the Disabled People's Movement* presented by Gisli Vogler (Centre for Open Learning, University of Edinburgh, UK)

11:00 – *Technological Unemployment and the Post-Work Utopia* presented by Elias Moser, Section Moral and Political Philosophy, University of Graz

11:30 – *"Hope and Despair": A philosophical Analysis of Thanatopolitics in the Philippine Public Health Crisis* presented by Hadje C. Sadjé (Ph.D. student/Visiting Researcher University of Hamburg/University of Vienna) & Philip James Miñoza, (Lyceum of the Philippines University-Manila/PhD. Student, University of Santo Tomas, España-Manila)

12-14: LUNCH BREAK

Second panel & Keynote 14-16 (moderator: Matti Syiem)

14:00 – *Disappointed Hope: Reimagining Resistance in the Wake of the Egyptian Revolution* presented by Maša Mrovlje (School of Social and Political Science, University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom)

14:30 – *Rethinking "Progress" in an Age of Uncertainty* presented by Matthew Slaboch (Department of Politics and Public Affairs, Denison University, United States of America)

15:00 – **KEYNOTE: Samantha Ashenden & Andreas Hess** *Why Virtues Will No Longer Do: Some Pros and Cons of Dystopian Perspectives* (moderator: Philip Strammer)

Keynote Speakers

April 14, 15:00 – KEYNOTE: Sven-Olov Wallenstein

DERRIDA AND THE APOCALYPTIC TONE

My talk will discuss Jacques Derrida's reading of Kant and the apocalyptic tone in his *D'un ton apocalyptique adopté naguère en philosophie* (1983). Derrida's text was initially presented as a lecture in a conference entitled *Les fins de l'homme*, and deals with how the theme of the end should be understood in deconstruction. Distancing himself from some of his earlier claims, he emphasizes that the idea of a death or end of philosophy is as old as philosophy itself, and that it can neither be embraced nor simply rejected. Lodged inside the apocalyptic address, he instead locates an injunction, "Come!," of a proto-ethical nature, which opens philosophy to an indeterminate other and sets up a complex dialogue with Kant.



Sven-Olov Wallenstein

keynote speaker



Sven-Olov Wallenstein is professor of philosophy at Södertörn University in Stockholm. Recent publications include *Critical Theory: Past, Present Future* (ed. with Anders Bartonek, 2021), *Spacing Philosophy: Lyotard and the Idea of the Exhibition* (2019, with Daniel Birnbaum), and *Adorno: Negativ dialektik och estetisk teori* (2019).

April 15, 15:00 – KEYNOTE: Rastislav Dinić

WHAT IS REALIST IN CAPITALIST REALISM

The concept of capitalist realism, defined by British philosophy and cultural theorist, Mark Fisher as “the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it”, has been used many times during the last decade to explain different phenomena in society, psychology, politics, literature and popular culture. However, a philosophical analysis of the concept, as well as serious philosophical engagement with Fisher's ideas, has been largely absent, especially in the analytic mode of contemporary academic philosophy. In this talk, I will try to show how such an engagement might be fruitful, both in respect of deepening our understanding of Fisher's key concept, and in respect of applying this concept in order to shed new light on certain trends in contemporary ethics and political philosophy. To answer the titular question – what is realist in capitalist realism? I will turn to Cora Diamond's influential discussion of realism and the realistic spirit.

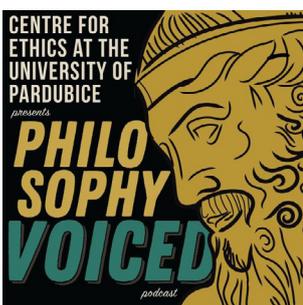


Rastislav Dinić

keynote speaker



Rastislav Dinić is an associate professor in the Department of Philosophy, at the University of Niš, Serbia. His interests lie in the fields of ethics and political philosophy, as well as the philosophy of Stanley Cavell. He writes on politics and popular culture for *Peščanik*.



The Centre podcast (Philosophy Voiced) aims to provide lively, philosophically profound exchanges with leading philosophers of our time.

In **THIS EPISODE** of Philosophy Voiced, we are joined through Zoom by Rastislav Dinić. We are discussing a paper written by Professor Dinić called “Friend as Enemy: Notes on Cavell and Socialism (via Makavejev).”

If you would like to read the paper we are discussing, it was published in **Conversations: The Journal of Cavellian Studies**, no. 5 (2017) “The Aesthetics of Politics and the Politics of Aesthetics In and After Cavell”, 27 February 2018. A link to the pdf is here: <https://doi.org/10.18192/cjcs.v0i5.2407>

April 16, 15:00 – KEYNOTES: Samantha Ashenden & Andreas Hess

WHY VIRTUES WILL NO LONGER DO: SOME PROS AND CONS OF DYSTOPIAN PERSPECTIVES

We will start, first, by sketching the broad contours of the discussion between Hannah Arendt and Judith Shklar and then argue, second, why juxtaposing the two matters. It channels the debate and helps us to focus on some crucial elements: the role of the politics of law and legalism, the distinction between positive and negative liberty, the future of republican and liberal thought, and the epistemological function of exile.



Samantha Ashenden

keynote speaker



Samantha Ashenden is Reader in Politics and Sociology at Birkbeck College, University of London. She has published on Judith Shklar, Michel Foucault, Jürgen Habermas, and Niklas Luhmann; on problems of power, violence, and legitimacy, and on feminist theory, child sexual abuse and the contemporary regulation of surrogacy agreements. Together with Andreas Hess she is editor of Judith N. Shklar's *On Political Obligation* (2019) and *Between Utopia and Realism: The Political Thought of Judith N. Shklar* (2019).

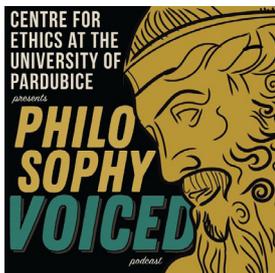


Andreas Hess

keynote speaker



Andreas Hess is professor of sociology at University College Dublin. His research interests are mainly in historical sociology and social and political thought. He is the author of *The Political Theory of Judith N. Shklar* (2014) and *Tocqueville and Beaumont: Aristocratic Liberalism in Democratic Times* (2018), and editor (with Samantha Ashenden) of Judith N. Shklar's *On Political Obligation* (2019) and *Between Utopia and Realism: The Political Thought of Judith N. Shklar* (2019).



In **THIS EPISODE** of Philosophy Voiced, we are joined through Zoom by Samantha Ashenden, Reader in the Politics Department at Birkbeck, University of London, and Andreas Hess, Professor in the School of Sociology at University College Dublin.

Hosts Matti Syiem, Philip Strammer, and Patrick Keenan discuss with Sam and Andreas their article in *Aeon* “The theorist of belonging: Discovering Judith Shklar’s liberalism of fear”, their edited book *Between Utopia and Realism*, and Judith Shklar’s essay *Liberalism of Fear*, among other topics relating to the political theory of Judith Shklar.

Special Event



April 15, 19:00 – A discussion of the documentary film **Ticket to the Moon** with director **Veronika Janatková** (moderator: **Aneta Kohoutová**)

TICKET TO THE MOON YOUTUBE TRAILER
WATCH THE FILM (AVAILABLE TUESDAY, APRIL 13)

SYNOPSIS: At the frenzy of the Space Race almost 100.000 people on both sides of the Iron Curtain signed up to fly to the Moon at the PanAm’s First Moon Flights Club. World was split to two realities of the East and the West, but there was just one Moon, for everybody. Following the filmmaker’s grandfather, one of the fellow club members, **TICKET TO THE MOON** asks what did the mere thought and imagination of a trip to the Moon mean to these potential space travellers – on both sides of the Iron Curtain? What were they imagining to find? And how is this relevant for us now?

Today, 50 years after the Moon-landing, we are still dreaming about space, setting off for various missions - Moon, Mars and further on. Are the “Moon” generation’s dreams and aspirations the same as ours?





Veronika Janatková

special guest
film screening



Veronika is a film producer, director and programmer. She has been active mainly in the field of documentary films, focusing on social-political driven narratives. Among others she has worked on topics such as global supply chain in the textile industry, the dynamics of global south and north, current feminist movements in Rwanda or the political realities of post-soviet Caucasus region. Her directing debut is a documentary film *Ticket to the Moon* dealing with utopias in the context of space explorations in the time of cosmic spring.

Veronika co-founded and has been programming the DokuBaku IDFF, the first independent documentary film festival in Baku, Azerbaijan. Since 2019 she is the executive director of the tranzit.cz initiative running the international biennale of contemporary art *Matter of Art*.

Presenters' Abstracts

Critical utopianism from the periphery

Wouter Veldman (faculty of philosophy, theology and religious studies at Radboud University in Nijmegen, the Netherlands)

Around the world people are standing up to protest against racism, sexism, police brutality, climate injustice and dictatorship. By taking a critical stance against present socio-political conditions, these protesters aim to give a voice to the marginalised, the neglected and the oppressed. In a way, all of these protesters are motivated by a form of 'utopian longing': the belief that a future world is possible beyond the limitations that shape our present. How does this 'utopian longing from the periphery', as Sylvia Wynter describes it, differ from the utopianism of those firmly grounded in the centre of hegemonic discourse? What different kind of politics and normative imperatives are advanced by both types of utopian discourse? And how can a better understanding of these differences help us to evaluate the critical import of utopian narratives?

In my talk, I will explore the characteristics and differences of these two types of utopian longing by drawing on the critical thought of Sylvia Wynter and Alexander Weheliye. Using the contrast between Afrofuturist and transhumanist narratives about humanity's future as an example, I will argue that, while both types of utopianism envision a future modelled on some ideal or moral- existential imperative, they are structured rather differently. While hegemonic utopianism is about reaffirming what is possible in and because of the present — projecting the dominant ideals of today into the future — peripheral utopianism is aimed at unravelling the dystopia that is the present and that will be the future as long as we continue 'business as usual'.

In order to explain this, I will highlight two key elements of peripheral hegemonic utopianism which distinguish it from hegemonic utopianism: its diversification or 'exoticization' of contemporary discourse, and the grammatical structure of the future anterior (a verb which describes something that 'will have happened' or 'will have been overcome' in the future). Together, these two elements can help explain not only why a dystopian reality makes people turn to peripheral utopianism, but also how this narratological structure (in Afrofuturism, climate sci-fi, and other forms of utopianism) can help to critically confront present socio-political conditions. Indeed, it is precisely through peripheral utopianism that the marginalized and neglected can be given a voice, in the future as well as the present.

Towards a Wide View of Utopia Within Normative Experimentalism

Cedric Braun (University of St. Gallen)

As many intellectuals of the 20th century have figured out, teleological, substantive views of utopias distract attention away from real problems, or worse: they might take the form of totalitarian worldviews, fanaticism, war, and terror (e.g., Berlin, 2013; Dewey, 1979). Such thinkers tend to share the view that a first approximation to a better conception of utopias starts from identifying and acknowledging real problems (e.g., Branford, 2017; Festl, 2014; Moody- Adams, 1999; 2002; Walzer, 2013). A movement towards the better is then a movement away from an identified concrete problem, suffering etc. I argue that this 'negative teleology' is reasonable. But I also believe that such theories need to be complemented by art, establishing good communication between people, and other activities that assist creating a better future – for instance, engaging in interdisciplinary think tanks (Welzer, 2019).

John Dewey (1980) believed that "[p]hilosophy [...] is an idea of what is possible, not a record of accomplished fact" (p. 336). I will outline three elements which together provide a picture of the place of utopias in Normative Experimentalism alongside Dewey's philosophy: First, philosophy is not limited to conceptual analysis but is inextricably linked with imagination and art. With Dewey I argue that the picture that philosophy, art, religion etc. are disciplines with fixed roles is highly problematic (e.g., that art is concerned with imagining better possible futures, philosophy with social criticism and ethical theory etc.). Regarding ethical amelioration there is no need to construct a strict division of labor between disciplines because, for Dewey, art, ethical theory, philosophy of education – theory and practice – are but phases of life and experience. To isolate them would be a 'philosophical fallacy' with bad real- world consequences. Second, Normative Experimentalism holds that ethical amelioration is a strictly tentative venture based on trial and error. Fallibilism applied to the notion of good aims leads to formulating a condition to be met by any good utopias that might offer some guidance for fashioning a better future.

Finally, pragmatism's monistic philosophy which takes concrete living-experiences as its pivot enables us to think of ethics as an artful endeavor. This goes far beyond the fact that ethical deliberation implies imaginative effort. Imagination and deliberation themselves depend on good communication that relies on virtues such as openness to others' perspectives (Stroud, 2016) and that, in form of works of art, provides us with impressions of alternative ways of seeing the world (Dewey, 2005).

The Role of "Reasonable Hope" in Rawls' "Realistic Utopia"

Thorben Knobloch (Ruhr-University Bochum, Germany)

How should a political liberal approach international politics? Should she leave the nation state behind and look at ideal standards, as for example deployed by cosmopolitans, or rather be pragmatic and take the international sphere to be a Hobbesian "state of nature" of nation states, like political realists do? In this paper, which forms part of my PhD project, I want to argue that both sides can be accommodated regarding their core elements by reconstructing John Rawls' notion of a "realistic utopia" along the lines of what he calls "reasonable hope". According to this reading, Rawls is able to integrate the progressive element of cosmopolitanism and the pragmatic concern for political autonomy and path dependency.

The argument will proceed in three steps. It, first, will be demonstrated how Rawls' notion of a "realistic utopia" is based on a specific dystopian vision rooted in past political catastrophes, especially World War II and its cruelties. From this follows the need to overcome an international modus vivendi with its permanent threat of devastating catastrophes in favor of a rules-based system of political stability. The second step reconstructs the issue Rawls faces as an epistemic one: since there is no shared political culture on the global level from which one could draw a common pool of political values, it is unclear how to construct the rules of such a political system. The third step, then, shows how the notion of "reasonable hope" links certain aspects of the political culture of liberal democracies to issues of international politics. According to this reading, it is because of a lack of political knowledge on the international level that a political liberal's "best hope" is to apply a way of doing politics already known to be able to accommodate deeply rooted political disagreement. Since liberal democracies arguably developed a way of political thinking that allows for overcoming such disagreement, this way of thinking should inform a political liberal's approach to international politics – this way, it becomes "reasonable hope".

The paper closes by elaborating how this approach is able to integrate concerns of cosmopolitans as well as political realists and how it could be used to go beyond Rawls' own understanding by illustrating its application to the issue of international freedom of movement.

Economic Optimism and the Anthropocene: On Nietzsche's Transformation of Herrmann's Economy

Sören E. Schuster (Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, Deutschland)

In 1887, the Austrian economist Emanuel Herrmann attempts the unification of humanities and natural sciences through a pure economics. Following a teleological stage model of world history, the "central directorate of the world economy" (Herrmann 1887: 301) would thus redeem humanity from its economic necessities and lead it towards freedom. Friedrich Nietzsche turns Herrmann's "economic optimism" (KSA 12, 10[17]) upside down and confronts it with an economic countermovement revealing the devastating outcome of a so-constituted concept of the economy. Today, attempts to unify humanities and natural sciences regain relevance: the Anthropocene is often credited with the role of a „boundary object“ (Reichel & Perey 2018: 242) that could provide an holistic approach to global problems like climate change. Against this background, I will retrace Nietzsche's discussion of Herrmann's optimism and estimate its relevance for the academic discourse on the Anthropocene.

First, I briefly reconstruct the economic concept of nature in Herrmann and trace back the roots of its teleological stage model. Through the rational application of the laws of pure economics, economists would establish an epoch of competition as a mild form of war that could already be anticipated in the United States of America of Herrmann's times. After the disappearance of economic necessities, humanity's high cultural goals as the final stage of model could be advanced. I will secondly give a critical introduction to the scarcely recited passages of Nietzsche's discussion of Herrmann covering the condition of the source as parts of the Unpublished Fragments (Fuchs 1997) and the state of research. Instead of assuming a coherent system of philosophy that could be found in Nietzsche's late work (Müller-Lauter 1999, De Gennaro 2012), I thirdly follow a historico-critical approach (Sommer 2015) and focus on the concrete transformation of Herrmann's optimism in KSA 12, 10[17]. After grasping the text as an intervention against Herrmann's stage model, I reconstruct Nietzsche's transformation of the economy as a repoliticization that unfolds far-reaching conditionalities concerning the unification of humanities and natural sciences. In an outlook, I estimate the relevance of Nietzsche's intervention and the transformation of the economy for the discourse on the Anthropocene. Does the Ecomodernist Manifesto (Asafu-Adjaye et al. 2015) represent a further concept of economic optimism? What are the prospects for degrowth (Demaria et al. 2015) as a rather pessimistic countermovement?

The Educational Utopia: Philosophy, Literature, and Educational Practice in the Works of Rousseau, Korczak, and Bernfeld

Efrat Davidov (Ph.D candidate in the department of philosophy, Bar Ilan University, Israel)

In this interdisciplinary paper, I present *Emile or On Education* (1762), the monumental canonic educational book by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, as a work that defines a new literary-philosophical sub-genre: Educational Utopia. In the light of this definition, I examine the connection between philosophy, literature and educational practice, in *Emile* and in two other works that have not yet received the research attention they deserve.

Emile has mostly been accepted as a philosophical work; however, it does not present only abstract ideas, and is not written in a theoretic way, characteristic of the philosophical discipline. Instead, Rousseau chose to invent an imaginary apprentice, whom he could sublimate his philosophical-educational ideas. The unique shape of the educational philosophy presented in Emile, as a fictional description of an ideal education, resembles the literal form of the utopia. However, while the classical utopia usually serves the discipline of political philosophy, Emile focuses on educational philosophy. I argue that Emile, hence, is an educational utopia, a unique and rare sub-genre, with special characteristics and functions.

Aside from Emile, I found two other fascinating works, that fit perfectly into the category of educational utopia: *School of Life* (1906), by educator and author Janusz Korczak; and *The Jewish People and Its Youth* (1919), by psychoanalyst and Zionist activist Siegfried Bernfeld. Despite the great difference in each of their visions, the three pieces are educational utopias in the sense that they criticize the existent order regarding education in society, and they portray an ideal alternative educational framework through fiction.

The educational utopia, I argue, extends beyond the literal and philosophical sphere, and seeks to influence the educational practice. Each of the three utopias is examined through the prism of the relationship between the utopia and the practice: The function the utopia aspired to fulfill; the historical influence it actually had; and the author's personal-biographical function.

The paper highlights the advantages and the risks of the rhetoric form of the educational utopia regarding its practical function. On one side of the scale stands the scenario in which the utopia functions as an ideal guiding vision that is aware of its limits and lights up the path of the educator; on the other hand, the potential risk the utopia poses, because of its narrative form, is that it would be an embodied alternative for reality and thus will discourage those who are involved in the craft of educational work.

The Symposium on Gilead Studies

Eric Wilkinson (McGill University, Canada)

Both Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and its sequel *The Testaments* (2019) depict the dystopian society of Gilead. Gilead is a theocratic, totalitarian society that arose following a coup wherein the President was assassinated and Congress stormed by armed militants, causing the death of most members of Congress. The quasi-Christian Gilead enforces strict gender roles that prohibit women from reading, writing, owning property, handling money, or having any control over their own lives. Atwood expressed that when writing her dystopian fiction, she sought to include only variations on ideas and events that have occurred in reality. The result is two novels that have lasting resonance with our social reality as ultimately, they have their basis in that reality. Particularly instructive to us academics are the fictional postscripts of the novels, which constitute a biting satire of academic conferences. Here I focus on Atwood's satire of academia found in the final pages of *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments*, and their implications for our practices.

The Handmaid's Tale and *The Testaments* conclude with a fictional postscript that includes the proceedings of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Symposium on Gilead Studies, respectively. These fictionalized conference proceedings take place approximately two-hundred years after the events of the novels, and contain the addresses given by keynote speaker Professor James Darcy Pieixoto. The addresses mostly explain how the narratives that comprise each novel were discovered by later scholars, speculate on the authorship of the writings, and provide additional details about Gilead. However, sewn within Professor Pieixoto's historical lectures are threads critical of the detached nature of academic practice. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Pieixoto remarks that "we must be cautious about passing moral judgment on the Gileadeans." Appealing to cultural relativism, the academic declines to condemn Gilead—which reads ironically as an indictment of academic detachment and moral cowardice after the reader has experienced the horrors of Gileadean society. *The Testaments* continues this critique of academia by revealing that the historical discoveries made about Gilead led mainly to peer reviewed papers rather than inoculating society against relapsing into autocracy. The lesson of Atwood's satire is that academic abstention from moral criticism, and isolation from broader society, renders the insights of academics useless in preventing dystopian social outcomes.

On Literature as Oscillation, and Oscillation as Utopian

Erik Lindman Mata (The School of Culture and Education, Södertörn University, SE)

This paper aims to benefit the organization of the Left – a consciously broad term – in its attempt to move society beyond capitalism. Building upon Anahid Nersessian's concept of a "utopia of adjustment" and Roland Barthes' understanding of "idiorrhymy" I elucidate the possibilities of a situated oscillation between the existing and the non-existing, the available and the possible. Such a proposal would dislocate the already peculiarly asymmetrical binary of dystopia and utopia (the prefix eu- lurking in the background) in favor of Nersessian's planetary bounded "poor use" and Barthes' proposed way of joining the individual and the common, the particular and the general, through a supple, idiosyncratic rhythm. This oscillation is presented, drawing on Samuel Beckett's reading of Proust and Reinhart Koselleck's examination of the concept of progress, as an always- already layered topos, a kind of -topia if you will, that can serve to supplement the function that utopia currently inhabits in progressive politics.

This current function, I argue, is to a high degree limited to utopian thinking and writing as a structural demystification of the ideological inescapability of the status quo. If I can paint it, we can make it, so to speak. Notwithstanding the nuances made in Fredric Jameson's exposition of the need of utopia, the tendency to view utopia as a possible way of dodging the dual trap of reactionary politics and unfeasibility is, by itself, not fruitful. Setting aside the dull discussion hinging on the binary of reform versus revolution, I argue that this 'wake-up call function' of utopia evades the problem of an existing or immanent heterogeneity of utopias; or at the very least it does nothing to handle said heterogeneity.

The idea proposed in this paper of a situated or fettered oscillation is an attempt to acknowledge a productive, historical gray zone in

which utopian writing and thinking could, or perhaps must, move. This idea partially serves the same disturbing function as the current understanding of utopia, but by emphasizing the fullness of the available. Such a fullness can, I argue, be perceived and expounded in an exemplary way in works of literature. But this also exposes a conflict between Nersessian's idea of adjustment and boundaries and the inherent excess built into the affirmation of *idiorrhythmy*. I do not attempt to solve this problem, but hope instead to use it to enhance the sensibility of *see-sawing* between this wound and the next.

Moving Back as Moving Forward: Jewish Philosophy and the Restorative Messianic Utopia

Piotr Sawczyński (Institute of Political Science and International Relations, Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland)

The paper offers a critical reconstruction of the debate led by two prominent Jewish thinkers of the twentieth century – Leo Strauss and Gershom Scholem – on the temporal nature of messianism. In his famous essay *Progress or Return?*, Strauss argues that the modern ideal of progress has backfired, leading us to “the brink of an abyss” and bringing about the unprecedented crisis of Western civilization. Consequently, a contemporary man needs to be “redeemed” from progress and brought back to the origins. The application of the messianic idiom to the critique of progress might be surprising but Strauss's argument is that the Jewish idea of redemption (*tikkun*) has been primarily associated with *teshuva*, or the return; progressive messianism is merely a secular, political distortion of its original, restorative message. In other words, Jewish messianism is not future-oriented but rather – to use Zygmunt Bauman's term – *retrotopian*. Strauss's powerful thesis is strongly opposed by Scholem who accuses him of the Neoplatonic misreading of Jewish messianism. In his fundamental essay *Towards an Understanding of the Messianic Idea in Judaism*, Scholem highlights “a strictly utopian impulse” to be found in modern Jewish messianism, particularly in kabbalistic speculations, and argues that its message is much more ambiguous: neither restorative, nor progressive but restorative and progressive at the same time. What messianists wish to “restore” are not the actual beginnings but the “origins” that – due to cosmological and historical ruptures – had never existed. Consequently, they think of *tikkun ha-olam* as a restitution of full potentiality, a return “to that which never was”.

While offering a philosophical account of Strauss and Scholem's dispute, I wish not only to reconstruct their arguments but also – more importantly – to deconstruct their apparent antitheticity and use them to reconceptualize the Jewish messianism as essentially stretched (torn?) between restoration and utopia: the phantasm of original perfection (Strauss) and the kairological image of “present where we have never been” (Scholem).

Are we Looking Forward? Utopia and Dystopia as a Mirror of the Present Society

Šárka Lojdrová (Department of Aesthetics, Charles University, Czech Republic)

In my presentation, I will approach utopias and dystopias – predominantly as artforms – through the philosophy of art and history of an American philosopher Arthur C. Danto. The conference title, “Looking Forward in Hope and Despair,” implies that utopias and dystopias provide us with the vision of the future. But are we really looking forward? My thesis is that utopias and dystopias say about our current state of affairs, and therefore they reflect our present hopes and despairs or fears. Moreover, this thesis can explain why more utopias and dystopias written by marginalized political and societal groups have become more numerous.

Although Danto is known mostly as a philosopher of art, he paid systematic attention to the problems of the philosophy of history. In his *Analytical Philosophy of History and Narration and Knowledge*, he introduced the notion of narrative, i.e., a story used to explain past events, and argued that the future forms an integral part of the past. Thus, historical understanding has a retrospective character in that the meaning of an event changes in the light of future happening. Later in his career, Danto touched upon the problem of artistic representation of the future, especially in his essay *The End of Art*. In this essay, he claimed that our depiction of the world's future state says about our present but not about the future itself. Danto did not explicitly consider utopias and dystopias; however, his thesis is general enough to cover these particular artforms.

An Aesthetics of Atonal Music Between Utopia and Dystopia

Klára Kedvika Muhlová (Institute of Musicology, Masaryk University, Czech Republic)

In 1922, Arnold Schönberg proclaimed that he had discovered a way of composing music that foreshadows the further development of European musical culture, for at least a hundred years. It was the discovery of a twelve-tone compositional technique – a dodecaphony, which brought order to the hitherto unstructured free atonal composition.

Dodecaphony and atonality, based on the equality of all tones in the scale, mean the loss of the tonal center, even the loss of tonal relations, constitutive for the music of the previous eras – those relations served as a source of order and harmony in European music for hundreds of years. The tonal system is a theoretical and practical achievement of Western centuries for several centuries and many generations. – Composers, and especially music theorists, defending tonality, argued about tonality as a basic, natural principle of music, and a reflection of the natural order of sound itself.

Therefore, the loss of tonality in European music culture has become one of the factors contributing to the emergence of a new paradigm of music in the 20th century. Schönberg's claim about the importance of his own discovery ceases to seem so exaggerated and grandiose when looking at the subsequent development of this new paradigm.

Theorists and thinkers, who deal with the issue of dodecaphony and atonality, are not united, whether it is a positive or negative trend, from a developmental point of view. On the one hand, the new harmonic systems are seen as a space for free artistic expression, but

polemical voices fear the emptiness and uncertainty stemming from the denial of the tonality. The tonality, in which the laws of nature supposedly manifest themselves.

The paper focuses on the spectrum of opinions, classifying atonal music on the one hand as a utopian model of a free musical future, but on the other hand sharply criticizing this new development as a threat to the whole Western music culture, due to the denial of its innermost, proven and traditional principles.

We also pay special attention to the position of the new atonal system in the aesthetical discussions of the circumstances of totalitarianism.

Access & Excess: Queering and Crippling Towards Pervtopia

Balam Nedim Kenter (Center for Interdisciplinary Studies in Society and Culture, Concordia University, Montréal)

For me to be a utopia, it is enough that I be a body. —Michel Foucault

If utopia is a desirable imagined futurity, an elsewhere and an elsewhen at once, those who are excluded from desirable futures are residents of dystopia, or, worse, they are “already obsolete” (Attebery, 2002, p.192). For if utopia, is always against death (Adorno, 1988, p.10), those who are excluded from desirable futurities are associated with death, always already residents of the land of the dead, the realm of no-future. According to Edelman (2004), queers are one such group—excluded from heteronormative futures predicated on the phantasmagoric figure of the Child, and associated with the death drive and non-futurity. Another such group is the disabled, or as Shildrick would put it, those with anomalous bodyminds who exceed the boundaries of normative embodiment, subjectivity, and identity with their instability and irreducible difference (2009, p. 10-11).

While frequently charged with antiutopianism (Kafer, 2013; Munoz, 2019), there is a perverse kind of utopianism in Edelman’s work which will be the departure point for this paper. When Edelman uses phrases such as “the queerness we propose,” or “our queerness,” he is not necessarily speaking of a queerness of the here and now, but something more akin to Munoz’s Blochian temporal construct, that is, a queerness yet to come. This is a queer futurity that paradoxically posits a future of no-future. As in older meanings of the word “perverse” which signal a turning away from the normative path, as well as an undoing, destruction, corruption and subversion of what is accepted, this line of thought may point us towards a queercrip pervtopia.

In Crip Theory, McRuer (2006) argues for a mutually constitutive relationship between compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness where both heterosexuality and able-bodiedness produce, and are contingent upon, one another while also being continually transformed by capitalism. Kafer (2013) has a similar project in *Feminist, Queer, Crip* but with a particular focus on working out connections and differences between queer and crip temporalities in the interest of advancing the work of constructing desired queercrip futures. This paper draws from both McRuer and Kafer but differs from them in its concern with excess and death as optics that may inform and complicate the notion of utopia.

Excess seems to be associated with utopia, queerness, and, disability in productive ways. Death, on the other hand, seems to be the hard limit of all three, as well as that of temporality and futurity. Pervtopia differs from and exceeds utopia which is often imagined as an enclave bounded against death, disability, and dystopia. Pervtopia takes seriously, and playfully, the challenge of death to visions of futurity and constructions of utopian temporality. In order to explore these concerns, the paper focuses on the life and death of a figure in whose lifework they seem to converge, namely Bob Flanagan, the Supermasochist, who opened paths to imagining queer and crip futurities in his performance art that brought cystic fibrosis in conversation with sadomasochism, or what I will call notions of disability and access with perversity and excess.

This paper will follow three related arcs (Futurity: Queer time and Crip time; Non-Futurity: Death and Excess; and Pervfuturity: Access and Excess) and ask some of the following questions: How to forge a queer, perverted, disabled futurity against a futurity of compulsory able-bodiedness/able-mindedness, compulsory heterosexuality, compulsory white supremacy, compulsory cisnormativity, compulsory labor? How can prospective disability and impending death become our aides in this? How can what might be seen as a form of hopelessness and a foreknowledge of absolute finality become the work of hope?

‘No future’ for queers: an investigation into pregnancy and queer joy as utopia

Cathrin Fischer (University College Dublin)

This paper offers a critique of pre-dominant ‘no future’ approaches in queer theory through phenomenological accounts of pregnancy. In her 2015 autotheory *The Argonauts*, Maggie Nelson challenges both the notion of pregnancy (positing it as queer) and queerness (positing a queer reproduction). To make sense of her description of pregnancy as ‘queer’, I draw on phenomenological accounts of pregnancy, particularly those from Iris Marion Young, Sara Heinämaa and Jane Lymer. I suggest that pregnancy is indeed a queer bodily experience in that the pregnant body constantly queers ‘normal’ embodiment. However, as Nelson herself points out, the notion of pregnancy as queer is so striking and counter-intuitive because pregnancy is firmly associated with reproductive futurity, through its connection to heterosexual relationships and patriarchal heteronormativity. I turn towards a discussion of the anti-social thesis in queer theory and offer a futuristic but non-heteronormative account of queer pregnancy and reproduction. I argue that the anti-futurity of queerness goes hand in hand with a focus on negative affect in queer theory, queer activism, and queer culture. In other words, these spaces are almost devoid of a discussion of queer joy. In *The Uses of the Erotic*, Audre Lorde implies a queering of joy in making space to share joy with those who are Other and locating joyfulness not in securing the future of any particular identity or group, but rather using joy to open up a futurity in which people are valued in being Other. Queer(ed) joy, I suggest, can be found in the embrace of one’s

deviance, in queer community, in the acknowledgement of pain as a necessity in life and in queering queerness itself by embracing its fluid, permeable identity. Lastly, I explore how Nelson, in juxtaposing her changing body during pregnancy and her partner's changing body during gender transition, suggests that changing and transforming bodies are queer, not matter what the transformation. Through this, I illuminate how queerness is not something devoid of futurity but that queer pregnancy embraces messy and uncanny aspects of reproduction and opens up the possibility of a discussion of queer utopia.

Relational value in environmental ethics and animal ethics

Yunjie Zhang (PhD candidate, Department of Philosophy, Glasgow University, UK)

Debates about whether we should treat nature well and whether we should engage in animal experimentation have come to a stalemate. In environmental ethics, anthropocentrists argue that humans can treat nature however they want as long as it benefits them and doesn't harm any humans. Non-anthropocentrists disagree because they think that nature has intrinsic value. In animal ethics, Utilitarians argue that humans can experiment of animals as long as it has a net benefit for humans. Proponents of the Moral Rights View disagree because they think animals have intrinsic value. Whether or not non-human beings have intrinsic value plays a crucial role in the above debates. My presentation concerns what to do in the face of moral conflicts between humans and non-human entities, i.e., nature and non-human animals. Which side, if any, should we favour and when? I argue that we can sidestep these debates if we focus our attention on the relational value of nature and animals as opposed to thinking about whether they have intrinsic value. I also argue that the reason that all these moral views conflict on the issue of intrinsic value is that they focus only on individuals as bearers of value and ignore how individuals are related to each other and the value that arises from these relations.

I want to examine an introduction of "relational value" by Chan et al. from a recent opinion piece in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (Chan et al. 2016). I agree with Chan that "relational value" will provide a new perspective for viewing our relationship with different species and even the whole of nature. However, Chan has misunderstood the role intrinsic value really plays in environmental ethics because he only focuses on the Kantian version of intrinsic value. According to this version, the bearers of value are only individuals instead of the states of affairs. Moreover, Chan's relational value doesn't focus on the concept of relational value in a philosophical account but only uses it as a methodology to deal with environmental emergencies.

For understanding my version of "relational value", I will compare it with intrinsic value and instrumental value separately. That is, 1) recognising "animals or nature has intrinsic value" is not sufficient to motivate humans to treat animals or nature well because few people make personal choices purely based on whether things possess intrinsic worth. However, humans are often motivated to make an effort to treat things well if they know and understand how valuable and important their relationships with animals and nature are. 2) some may question whether relational value differs from instrumental value. In virtue of the instrumental value position, human are concerned about animals or nature because it will bring our own goods. Similarly, knowing the important relationships between humans and others so that human will take moral oughts to other species and nature. Indeed, it will also benefit human's own goods. However, the relational value has multiple loci, e.g. single entities and also the relation itself. I want to emphasize: i. if something has value, it is because it's in a certain relationship. ii. some relationships are valuable in themselves, regardless of whether any of the relata are valuable.

The Minor Utopia of the US Disability Rights Struggle: Drawing on the Resources of the Disabled People's Movement

Gisli Vogler (Centre for Open Learning, University of Edinburgh, UK)

This paper analyses the achievements of the US disability rights movement through the framework of utopianism. I draw on recent utopian literature to interpret the activities leading up to the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 as an example of a successfully implemented minor utopia. Utopianism was from its very beginning caught in a tension between the impulse towards abstraction and realisation, imagination and prefiguration, as evidenced by Thomas More's wordplay on ou-topia and eutopia. The interplay of these impulses has meant that utopianism exhibits several distinct currents and, today, can be separated into two strands: a visible strand in the form of major utopian projects and 'a more covert, yet equally noteworthy stand that draws on utopian thinking and acting so as to gain distance from the status quo' (Thaler, 2019: 1007). The former has come to be associated with the totalising ideological projects of the 20th century and is the focus of much of the negative attitude towards utopias. The latter entails a broadening of the definition of utopia to include different expressions of a 'desire for a better way of being or of living' (Levitas, 2013: xii; El-Ojeili, 2020: 17). The paper turns to disability activists and writers to show that this minor utopia required a re-casting of the historically negative relationship between utopia and disability as key to imagining and enacting a better future for all people. Alison Kafer has powerfully summarised the one-sided utopian thinking at the heart of disability and the non-disabled imaginary, noting that disability is the site of no future, or 'at least of no good future' (Kafer, 2013: 3). In exploring the utopianism of the US disability rights movement, the paper, firstly, contributes to efforts to refine our understanding of the alternative visions of society at the heart of progressive politics and intellectualism. Secondly, it shows representatively how we could draw on the as-yet undervalued political and theoretical resources for struggles towards greater freedom, equality, and justice found in the disability community.

Technological Unemployment and the Post-Work Utopia

Elias Moser (Section Moral and Political Philosophy, University of Graz)

Recent economic scenarios advocate the thesis that, in the near future, a large number of jobs can be taken over by intelligent software or smart robotics (Frey and Osborne 2013; Brynjolfsson and McAfee 2014). Although this development leads to a significant increase

in economic welfare, there is a threat of mass unemployment. Based on these scenarios an academic discourse has revolved around the question how to react to the challenge of so-called “technological unemployment.” In this presentation, I will briefly outline the discourse and then discuss a highly interesting philosophical position recently advocated by John Danaher (2019). He defends the idea of a “post-work utopia” – a future society in which people do not have to work and nevertheless are able to lead a meaningful and decent life. I will discuss different objections to the utopian ideal and I show that, the account implicitly assumes a critical stance towards economic growth. Furthermore, in order to be feasible, substantive changes to our political systems are needed. I will introduce and discuss some political options to strive towards a utopian post-work society.

“Hope and Despair”: A Philosophical Analysis of Thanatopolitics in the Philippine Public Health Crisis

Hadje C. Sadje (Ph.D. student/Visiting Researcher University of Hamburg/University of Vienna)

Philip James Miñoza (Lyceum of the Philippines University-Manila/PhD. Student, University of Santo Tomas, España-Manila)

The disruption of life’s normality under the current global pandemic raised a deep existential concern and ethical import in our lives both as an individual and as a part of society. Despite the plea for solidarity among leaders and policymakers in the Global community, the contrasting approach of both known democratic and prevalent authoritarian leaders of our times in addressing the crisis either revealed its success or its utter failure. If examined from the milieu of the latter, the outbreak of COVID-19 unveiled the injustices of the global political-economic order due to the exclusionary tactics it uses. This includes the clear rift between the privileged and marginalized where the issues of healthcare systems raise the question “what did COVID-19 reveal about global health systems?” and the manner in which bodies are orchestrated to be subjects of discipline. It is perhaps evident enough that we have witnessed how the exercise of power over life by the state and its apparatuses has intensified in terms of governing subjects as an iota of the whole population. Such control over the life of the species amidst the pandemic is not solely a biological concern intended to contain the virus but is also a political question on how we are governed and contained in the confines of our social spaces. This demands from us a normative insight that shall call into question the forms of domination that have been normalized under the label of the “new normal”, or perhaps point out how much of what is revealed has been with us or has been in the underbelly of our systems all along. This paper shall work on the premise that the current pandemic demystified how the authoritarian tendencies of current populist leaders such as Duterte govern via the paradox of strategic control without a political blueprint to sustain the life of the population. The thread of our discussion will follow four important points: first, as a springboard of the succeeding points, it is set to discuss important aspects of Foucault’s concept of biopolitics to shed light on how current practices of government resonate his genealogical description; second, developed out from the previous point is the emphasis on how the current practice of governing subjects reveal not the supposed security of the population but its divisive tactic to let a selected segment of the population be allowed to thrive while vulnerable communities are left to die. Third, to describe how the obverse of Foucault’s biopolitics – i.e. ‘thanatopolitics’ which focuses on how “death” both as a physical and psychological violence is politically produced – unfold in the context of the Philippine pandemic. And last, in challenging these practices of state of exception, what political philosophy can offer in the response to the government that failed to promote, improve, and sustain the social well-being of the general population.

Disappointed Hope: Reimagining Resistance in the Wake of the Egyptian Revolution

Maša Mrovlje (School of Social and Political Science, University of Edinburgh, United Kingdom)

Ten years after the Arab Spring uprisings in Egypt, little seems to be left of the hopes they engendered. Many activists themselves remember the uprisings with a sense of profound disappointment. The problem, however, is that the widespread sense of disappointment has come to be seen – in the words of Nesrine Malik – as “a repudiation of the very notion of protest.” Yet might not the sense of disappointment bear within itself the seeds of a new hope to resist again and differently in the future? Against the fatalist narratives of the Arab Spring, I propose to explore the politically transformative potential of disappointment, specifically its ability to reconfigure the resisters’ horizon of hope.

To that end, I theorise disappointment as an existential feeling that manifests itself as a way of being in the world and reframes our perception of the possibilities for political action. I argue that the resisters’ disappointment can lead to what Ernst Bloch called “educated hope:” a hope embodying the fundamental, existential human impulse to imagine a life otherwise, which however has undergone the learning experience of disappointment and is aware of the unpredictability of the future. I propose that disappointment can reconfigure the resisters’ horizon of hope along the following three axes: 1) it can unhinge the utopian impulse from the pre-defined goal and direct it towards a persistent, ever-reborn striving for greater freedom and justice; 2) it can redirect the energies towards a practice-oriented negotiation of the concrete possibilities and limitations of political action; and 3) it can lead to an openness towards the genuinely new that is predicated upon the willingness to bear the risk of failure.

I look for the practical articulation of disappointed hopes in the selected first-hand account of the Arab Spring uprisings in Egypt, Cairo: *Memoir of a City Transformed*, written by a prominent Egyptian activist and writer, Ahdaf Soueif. The memoir aptly shows how deep disappointments over the lack of social and political change did not mark the end of activism but inspired a new hopefulness about the however ambiguous potentials of political action in the present.

Rethinking “Progress” in an Age of Uncertainty

Matthew Slaboch (Department of Politics and Public Affairs, Denison University, United States of America)

In recent decades, respondents to “right track, wrong track” surveys administered globally have expressed profound dissatisfaction, if not with their own lives, then with trends in their countries, regions, or the world. In 2020, which Time declared “the worst year ever,” wildfires ravaged Australia and California, a novel coronavirus emerged in China and then wreaked worldwide devastation, and racial protests and a bitterly-fought presidential campaign laid bare the deep fissures that divide the American public. These events did little to raise morale: almost universally, people think that their societies and/or the rest of the world are in bad shape. But present discontent and the widespread belief that we are not now making progress do not necessarily imply a rejection of the idea of progress itself. This idea—that humanity can make lasting scientific, technological, economic, cultural, moral, and political advances—may yet hold currency, even in a dispirited age. Indeed, the well-worn charge by partisans of one stripe or another that their political opponents are on the “wrong side of history” suggests of those who brandish it that they believe history should and does move from worse to better, or “wrong” to “right.” We should investigate whether the idea of progress still holds popular appeal. We should also consider what adherence to or rejection of this idea entails. Is the expectation that the future will be better than the past a helpful one? Nobody would be aggrieved by actual, realized improvements. But the dogmatic insistence on a “better” future led prior regimes (e.g., Nazi and Soviet) to inflict tremendous pain on millions of people. On the other hand, if the idea of progress loses its sway, might we lose with it the spirit of boldness and innovation that make problem-solving possible?

This paper will critically assess contemporary debates about the nature of historical change and what we can expect from the future, with particular attention paid to the meaning and reality of “progress.” Included in this survey are prominent proponents of the idea of progress (such as Johan Norberg and Steven Pinker), and critics on the left (e.g., Rupert Read and Joan Wallach Scott) and the right (e.g., Alexander Dugin and Steve Bannon).

Conference Organizers / PhD Students at Centre for Ethics



Aneta
Koboutová

Dissertation subject: Ethics of public space

Dissertation abstract:

Following from my deep interest in working with public space, my work deals with its definition, and some of the ethical questions that relate to it. This term is commonly used in public discourse, but it can be assessed from the point of view of different theories to achieve new conclusions.

My starting point will be Michael Foucault's idea of power and space. Foucault claims that space involves socio-functional properties and goals and has cultural-symbolic and representative layers. In Foucault's concept of power/knowledge, space is denoted as the medium of - and the instrument for - the practice of power. In addition to Foucault's theory I will consider different kinds of approaches to citizenship, activism, urbanism and public space advocated by Henry Lefebvre, M. De Certeau, Mark Paterson, etc. In their works these approaches interact and merge with each other. Groups of people with given approaches can share interests or be in conflict with one another. The groups of people share public space and impose their attitudes, expectations and intentions onto the space. From this, the question follows whether there could be any universal ethics of public space. The premise is that usually, one of the approaches becomes dominant in a given space and this approach comes to dictate the ethical rules implemented in that space. The core problem I would like to address in my work, is how alternative approaches to and experiences of public space can change how public space is used. I will analyse, in a number of concrete cases, how different tools and approaches can work in practice, how they build the ethics of public space or how they can relativize it. In general, the approach of those who hold formal power can be considered as dominant in public space. However, for the conclusion of my work it will be important to observe that the effort of an individual can help to disrupt this power monopoly.



Carolina
Davis

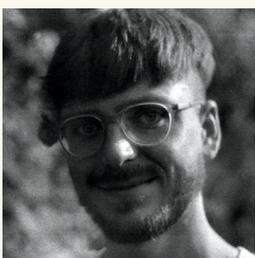
Dissertation subject: Palaeologus beyond Palaeologus

Dissertation abstract:

Coming from the field of history, Carolina Davis has focused her previous research on cultural and intellectual history since the early modern era. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of her specialization, she is currently working on the philosophical topic of ideas and beliefs.

Her doctoral research subject is a case study of a 16th century intellectual and theologian, Jacobus Palaeologus (1520 – 1585). Palaeologus is a figure that presents the opportunity – and the challenge – to analyze a period of time throughout his personal history and writings, helping us to understand the changes he went through in terms of his own ideas of the world, beliefs and religious identity.

As a theoretical point of departure, Carolina has been employing concepts and notions of what does it mean to believe by the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset. However, her research will also set this topic in a broader perspective.



David Rozen

Dissertation subject: Attitudes towards the Environment, their Ethical Relevance and the Possibilities of their Transformation

Dissertation abstract:

The aim of my dissertation is to clarify our contemporary – seemingly paradoxical – situation that we *know* that many ecosystems are collapsing as a result of human activities, that their collapse will have significant negative consequences for human societies and, in many aspects, we also *know* how to improve their condition. Yet on both a political and personal level this environmental knowledge in most cases does not lead to significant environment-preserving behaviour. Our contemporary situation reveals – contrary to the common assumptions – that (1) *the disruption of planetary ecosystems cannot be taken as a purely technical issue* and that (2) *our environmental behaviour is not primarily determined by our environmental knowledge*. In order to understand (and perhaps change) our contemporary situation, we need to see it perspicuously in a relevant context – we need to go under the misleading technical surface of our environmental discussions and capture clearly with all significant connections what is determinative for our environmental behaviour.

As a starting point for this investigation, I use Wittgenstein's term "attitude" – a basal, often unreflected way of relating to a given issue which defines the scope of our way of seeing connections in the world and therefore also of our behaviour – which I develop in relation to the environment and claim, that (3) *our environmental behaviour is primarily determined through our "attitudes towards the environment"*. My research is a loosely Wittgensteinian investigation of the problematics of the disruption of planetary ecosystems which manifests itself in that I understand the above-mentioned problem as *uncertainty* which needs to be *dissolved*: (4) *our problem consists in that we do not see that what we in fact need to deal with are attitudes and that environmental issues are related to the overall framework of human lives and that hence they are primarily not technical, but philosophical and ultimately ethical issues*. Therefore, I see my philosophical task in the clarification of our situation – (5) *it is necessary to examine the constitution and functioning of our attitudes towards the environment in the context of other aspects of our lives with which they are related*. It can be summarized that the aim of my dissertation is to ultimately *cultivate* our way of seeing connections in relation to the environment. topic in a broader perspective.



*Diana
Kalášková*

Dissertation subject: Moral Power of Literature

Dissertation abstract:

My dissertation discusses the many various forms that philosophical argumentation may take. One of my guiding thoughts, therefore, is that we will attain a too narrow view of argumentation if we think of it as clear logical inferences only. I want to examine the various ways in which works of literature also can be considered as a form of philosophical argumentation, even if they lack the standard form of a philosophical argument. The literary argumentation engages our imagination, which enables us to see and understand a particular situation in different ways. By reading a work of literature we are confronted with rich images of our complex world which may be convincing in their own right. Narrative literature, therefore, may be said to provide us with different points of view, and can thereby help us see the reality of others: such images of particularities and different points of view are often extremely convincing, and may therefore be worth seeing as forms of argumentation.



İrem Güven

Dissertation subject: Eco-Ontology: The Flesh in Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze

Dissertation abstract:

The world went through several near-extinction phases in which life as we know it changed drastically. Today, we are again faced with such a crisis, in which human activity has played an important role. A philosophical approach to the environmental problem could be via the criticism of the long-standing notion of man “as the measure of all things”, and a questioning of the way we understand the environment as objects given to his usage. In this project, I intend to provide a critique of anthropocentrism by searching for the terms of an ontology which calls attention to the embodied existence of the *anthropos*, and explores the possibility of a posthumanist subjectivity (or rather a-subjectivity), and a posthumanist community.

To this aim this project (1) will have recourse to Merleau-Ponty’s concept of flesh as a bodily principle, and its significance in establishing a posthumanist ontology; (2) explore the post-structuralist critique (particularly by Deleuze, but also by Derrida) of this concept as a transcendence in which singularity is annihilated, (3) show how the conceptions of self in Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze both work against the traditional conception of self as that which is kept immune from the contamination of non-human others; (4) investigate how to rethink the community as the co-existence of human and non-human entities, or as a place of contamination and becoming.



Lyra Koli

Dissertation subject: Iris Murdoch’s distinction between philosophy and literature

Dissertation abstract:

Iris Murdoch was a philosopher and a novelist who insisted on regarding philosophy and literature as two separate activities. “Philosophy”, she said, “aims to clarify and explain”. Literature, on the other hand, “is full of tricks and magic and deliberate mystification.” Despite this, much of the philosophical as well as literary research on Murdoch has attempted to overcome the divide, often by interpreting her novels as roundabout expressions of her philosophy. Contrary to this tendency, my PhD project aims at digging deeper into her distinction, by engaging with questions such as how literature “is essentially more free and enjoys the ambiguity of the whole man”, what it means that literature (and not philosophy) “is connected with sex” and should be considered as “close dangerous play with unconscious forces”, how she in writing her own novels had the self-conscious ambition of creating works of art as something different from doing philosophy, and why she nevertheless considered Sartre’s *La Nausée* to be a “good philosophical novel that I admire very much”.



Matti Syiem

Dissertation subject: The Role of Shame and Guilt in the Moral Development of Children

Dissertation abstract:

The aim of the study is to critically examine the role of shame and guilt in the moral development of children. This work will involve a philosophical analysis of these emotions, and an exploration of the differences between how adults and children experience them. Crucial to this study will be the role that shame and guilt play in moral development in relation to other moral emotions like anger, compassion, disgust and gratitude. Questions that will be explored pertaining to this topic are: are all kinds of shame feelings and guilt feelings morally relevant? To what extent are these emotions important for the moral education of children? I intend to place this study within the philosophical framework of Virtue Ethics by examining whether these emotions contribute to or are detrimental to a morally fulfilling life.



Mira Reyes

Dissertation subject: Otherwise than Anthropocentrism: Levinas Face-to-Face with the Animal

Dissertation abstract:

This project searches for a non-anthropocentric animal ethics based upon the thought of Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas' critique of onto-theology evades substance and reasonsponsored animal ethics that marginalises other avenues of seeing truth in value such as relationship and emotions. The problem, however, is that Levinas does not grant the animal the status of Face. He explained that animals belong to the Darwinistic struggle for life which is preoccupied with a life of appropriating for the self.

This thesis takes the challenge of:

1. demonstrating that Lévinas' central concepts affirm that the animal does have a Face;
2. showing that Levinasian ethics could sponsor a relational and care approach to animals that is an alternative to the rights, interest, and egalitarian species discourse;
3. criticising that the notion of 'humane' is not feasible without regard for the nonhuman Other.



Patrick Keenan

Dissertation subject: The Challenge Creative Computers Present to the Good Life

Dissertation abstract:

If it could one day become the case that computers were *creative* in the most robust sense of the word, i.e., computers showing real *mastery* of any creative domain (that is any problem-space in which creativity realizes its solution), be it in science or the arts, then this would represent a paradigm shift unlike anything before in human history and would compel us to rethink our fundamental philosophical conceptions of the good life and their practical applications in the real world. Present case studies of the effect of automation mistakenly imply that creative spaces are "off-limits" for computers, but this may not be the case. This thesis shows that creativity in computers is inevitable (or highly likely) and investigates some changes which could be made to public policy which account for this possibility, such as pushing the case for a citizen's dividend, a universal basic 'income' as a *right*, which frees up people to lead more meaningful lives -- lives which are full of work, but absent of labor (or the dependence on labor for survival). In the course of this thesis I will also look at Nietzschean and Arendtian conceptions of the individual, the role of technology as totalitarian, creativity as spontaneity and action, and the necessity of Utopian philosophy to reemerge with the individual and the miracle-making faculty of 'action' at its core.



Philip Strammer

Dissertation subject: The Transformation of Moral Standards in the Everyday

Dissertation abstract:

My PhD project aims at an investigation of the concept of *moral creativity*. Taking the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant as a starting point, I want to show how a moral theory that seems to reject a notion of creativity in the realm of universal morality can, on the basis of its own premises, be shown to be compelled to pave the way for an enriched concept of moral creativity. In attempt to further develop this concept, I will combine a genealogical and a systematic approach, examining to which extent Kant's immediate successors contribute to the project of understanding moral creativity. In this, I will firstly turn to Friedrich Schiller to show how an amalgamation of the moral and the creative 'after Kant' can be envisioned, before turning to G.W.F. Hegel's theory of *Sittlichkeit* as an attempt to unite morality and creativity as dialectical moments in an encompassing philosophical system. With Hegel, it becomes possible to develop an understanding of the dialectical relationship between the individual and the universal in ethical life, and, thus, of the role the individual plays in creatively restructuring the moral world it inhabits. This insight will then, eventually, be applied to Stanley Cavell's moral perfectionism, further illuminating how we, as individuals, can understand ourselves as continuously partaking in an open-ended process of moral transformation of self and *Sittlichkeit*. In proceeding thus, I attempt 1) to approximate two domains of normative theory, namely moral philosophy and aesthetics, while 2) converging Classical German philosophy with the primarily Anglophone philosophy of ordinary language going back especially to the late Wittgenstein.



Vladimir Lukić

Dissertation subject: Narrative Procedure of Political Deliberation

Dissertation abstract:

There is a paradigm that the core of our political deliberation originates from our rational comprehension of rights. Such is the paradigm of the Rawlsian tradition. However, I would like to propose an alternative that is based on the notion of the narrative. Recent studies from the fields of neuroscience and moral psychology have given us a lot to work with when it comes to the role of narrative in our lives. We are, I believe, first and foremost - narrative beings who construct their world view as a story by processing the social constructs. In that regard, by presupposing the meta-ethical position of social constructivism and the priority of good over right, I would like to argue that the narrative procedure of political deliberation has a lot of explanatory power. The philosopher who will prove to be a big influence to my aim will be Alasdair MacIntyre and his conception of narrative as a form of uniformity of life. Of course, I would dare to alter his conception in order for my goal to be fulfilled.