Gregynog Conference 2015

A PESGB@50 Edition: ‘Orientations Towards Wittgenstein’

Monday 27th July – Wednesday 29th July
(Monday 6 p.m. to Wednesday 11.30 a.m.)

SPEAKERS

Mikel Burley (University of Leeds)

*Imagining Philosophy of Religion Differently: Interdisciplinary Wittgensteinian Approaches*

Alexis Gibbs (University of Winchester)

“What makes my image of him into an image of him?” Philosophers on film and the question of meaning

Danièle Moyal-Sharrock (University of Hertfordshire)

*The Authority and Creativity of Language*

Catherine Rowett (University of East Anglia)

*Plato’s Meno: when the slave boy gets the right answer to a geometry question, without ever being taught, does he display knowledge or true belief, and what’s the difference?*

Naoko Saito (Kyoto University and Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies)

*The Twilight of American Philosophy*

Jeffrey Stickney (University of Toronto)

*Wittgenstein on rule-entanglement, contradictions and arbitrariness in educational language-games: "Where will the harm come?"*

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## Programme

### Monday

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| 8.00  | **Catherine Rowett** (University of East Anglia)  
  *Plato's Meno: when the slave boy gets the right answer to a geometry question, without ever being taught, does he display knowledge or true belief, and what's the difference?* |

### Tuesday

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| 9.30  | **Jeffrey Stickney** (University of Toronto)  
  *Wittgenstein on rule-entanglement, contradictions, and arbitrariness in educational language-games: "Where will the harm come?"* |
| 11.00 | Coffee                                    |
| 11.30 | **Naoko Saito** (Kyoto University and Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies)  
  *The Twilight of American Philosophy* |
| 1.00  | Lunch                                    |
| 2.00  | Opportunity to visit house and grounds     |
| 4.00  | Tea                                       |
| 4.30  | **Alexis Gibbs** (University of Winchester)  
  *“What makes my image of him into an image of him?” Philosophers on film and the question of meaning* |
| 6.30  | Dinner                                    |
| 8.00  | **Danièle Moyal-Sharrock** (University of Hertfordshire)  
  *The Authority and Creativity of Language* |

### Wednesday

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| 9.30  | **Mikel Burley** (University of Leeds)  
  *Imagining Philosophy of Religion Differently: Interdisciplinary Wittgensteinian Approaches* |
| 11.00 | Coffee and conference closes               |
Dr Mikel Burley

Imagining Philosophy of Religion Differently: Interdisciplinary Wittgensteinian Approaches

Abstract

The popularity over recent years of philosophy of religion, or ‘philosophy and ethics’, units in religious studies courses at A Level has contributed to a growing interest in this area of study at university level. Undergraduate modules in philosophy of religion, however, tend to be disappointingly narrow in cultural scope and unduly dry and abstract in methods of inquiry, exaggerating the role of propositional beliefs (or ‘truth-claims’) within religious forms of life and thereby exacerbating rather than mitigating the distorted conceptualization of religion that may already have begun at A Level. After outlining weaknesses in the approach often taken to teaching philosophy of religion, this paper considers both how increased interdisciplinary engagement can deepen and expand the cultural range of philosophy of religion and how Wittgenstein-inspired modes of investigation can facilitate such interdisciplinarity. The influence of Wittgenstein’s ideas in the study of religions outside philosophy is briefly surveyed, and examples given from my own teaching of how to integrate Wittgensteinian and interdisciplinary dimensions.

Dr Alexis Gibbs

“What makes my image of him into an image of him?” Philosophers on film and the question of meaning

This paper proceeds from the premise that film can be educational in a broader sense than its current use in classrooms for illustrative or instrumental purposes, and explores the idea that film might function as a form of education in itself. To investigate the phenomenon of film as education, it is necessary to first address a number of assumptions about film, the most important of which is its objective character under study. The objective study of film holds that the meaning of film awaits its correct interpretation according to an informed viewer. I suggest that theoretical modes of interpretation in this vein really amount to attempts to control
meaning via a particular lens, rather than allowing films to present meaning in necessarily ambiguous, and thus sometimes unsettling, ways. In this, there are parallels to be drawn with the ways some approaches to child psychology continue to position the child as object of theorising, whereby evaluative deductions can be drawn about their mental and cognitive development from empirical observation of behaviours and characteristics. Situating either film or child as object of study in this way continues a tradition of empiricism or naturalism in thought that both Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Ludwig Wittgenstein sought to critique as psychologism. Whilst no claim is made for reconceiving of Wittgenstein as phenomenologist, a dialogue between the *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology* and the *Phenomenology of Perception* reveals sympathies in attempts made by both to overcome a metaphysics of the object, whether the child or the image.

The importance of returning to these critiques is to show that, whilst developments in the philosophy and psychology of the child have come a long way in acknowledging the subjectivity of the child, film theory and philosophy still often rely on close readings of film that depend, whether according to critical/hermeneutic theories or formalistic analysis, on its status as object. But if we accept that the subjective experience of film cannot be reduced to that of a generalised viewer, as teaching reveals that individual experience can’t be generalised as that of a learner, then it becomes possible to suggest that the viewer, like the learner, is engaged in dialogue with another (film/teacher) whose experience is not reducible to their own. It is possible to suggest, as Stanley Cavell does, that films also think, talk to their viewer, engage them in an active dialogue – in short, that they might have a ‘mind of their own’ almost, their own subjectivity.

The final part to the paper explores what film’s subjectivity might mean for pedagogical practice in the classroom or lecture theatre. The literal representation of philosophers on film\(^1\) enacts something of the problem presented by psychologism: the incarnation of philosophers on screen lends itself to particular interpretations of their meaning, whether in terms of life or thought, that transcends their representation. As such, the philosopher on screen might serve the director’s didactic intent, but can be viewed as something of a distraction from the ways in which film might be understood as philosophical. Drawing on Cavell, I consider whether there isn’t greater pedagogic potential in viewing the film itself as philosopher-teacher, rather than the individual portrayed.

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\(^1\) Rossellini’s *Cartesius, Pascal*, and *Socrates* are prime examples, and in differing ways Derek Jarman’s *Wittgenstein*, Tariq Ali and Christopher Spencer’s *Spinoza* (1994), Margarethe von Trotta’s *Hannah Arendt* (2012), or Kirby Dick’s documentary film *Derrida* (2002).
Suggested background reading:
Merleau-Ponty, M. (1945) 'Film and the New Psychology'
Available at http://www.philosophy-of-education.org/events/gregynog-conference-readings.html

References
Klevan, A. (2014) ‘Vertigo and the Spectator of Film Analysis’, Film Philosophy (18): Special Section on Stanley Cavell, pp.147-171

Dr Danièle Moyal-Sharrock
The Authority and Creativity of Language

Abstract
What is the relation between language and reality? The traditional answer is that reality is independent of language; with language, we attempt to trace and render reality's (or nature's) inherent structure. Wittgenstein turns this conception around: for him, the only structure or system that we find in nature is the one we put into it, with language. This insistence on
the authority of language in the determination of our conceptual schemes has led some to charge Wittgenstein with 'linguistic idealism'; for, if our conceptions of the world are nothing but linguistic projections, how do they attach to the world? We seem to be left only with a world of our own making. In this paper, I argue that the vital role language plays in the constitution of our conceptual schemes does not estrange it from reality, both in that language is itself 'reality-soaked' (that is, embedded in and conditioned by reality), and in that language creates and extends some of our reality; it is, as Merleau-Ponty says, constitutive of some of our reality. With this in mind, I note the relevance of 'ordinary language philosophy' in using language as a key source of human understanding. Finally, with the help of F. R. Leavis and Merleau-Ponty, I take language to be the long-refined product of an immemorial collaboration which transmits, renews, elucidates and generates much of our lived reality, and it does this supremely in the masterworks of literature. This, I conclude, is where the creativity and regeneration of language are best seen -- and where the human, therefore, is best seen.

**Professor Catherine Rowett**

**Plato’s Meno:** when the slave boy gets the right answer to a geometry question, without ever being taught, does he display knowledge or true belief, and what’s the difference?

**Abstract**

In Plato’s *Meno*, Socrates challenges Meno’s young slave to identify a line on a diagram that is the base of a square with twice the area of the given square. The aim is to show that without any teaching, the boy can deploy knowledge that was already in his soul, and reject his own mistakes because he already possesses the necessary resources for doing so. Does the boy end up with knowledge, when he gets to the right answer, or only “true belief”? What else must he do to end up with knowledge, and why? In this paper I argue that Plato equates “orthe doxa” (correct opinion) with the ability to pick out a certain token of a type (as the boy does on the diagram), and science (*episteme*) with a fuller understanding of the type that it instantiates. It is that richer understanding of types and forms that allows the boy to grasp *the reason why this is the right answer* for what he successfully identified the first time. In selecting and rejecting various answers he had deployed a hazy grasp of what makes things count as double, but his grasp of it will not be clear and complete until he has discovered more about the many and varied ways in which things can be double in length, area, value, significance and many other ways.
Advance reading suggestions:
Plato's *Meno*, particularly from 80a to 86b, and 97a to 99d, in any good modern translation (preferably more recent than 1950).
Available at http://www.philosophy-of-education.org/events/gregynog-conference-readings.html

Professor Naoko Saito
The Twilight of American Philosophy

[T]he idea of asking philosophical positions, of attempted answers to the great philosophical questions, what difference they have made and can make in practice, what difference they make to our lives, is a necessary first step towards bringing philosophy back in contact with human concerns, a first step to doing what Dewey asked us to do when he wrote that “Philosophy recovers itself when it ceases to be a device for dealing with the problems of philosophers and becomes a method, cultivated by philosophers, for dealing with the problems of men.” (Putnam 2014)

In "The American Scholar" (1837), Ralph aldo Emerson declares the role of the American scholar as “Man Thinking” (Emerson 2000, p. 52) – as one who thinks for life and in life. The Scholar must be, Emerson says, “strong to live, as well as strong to think” (p. 51). This is the primordial form of American philosophy, what Emerson calls the “philosophy of life” (p. 58). Emerson's call for the American scholar was revived by Dewey in the 20th century as "Emerson – the Philosopher of Democracy" (Dewey 1977): Dewey developed the idea of democracy as a personal way of living (creating democracy from within), of philosophy for the common man, and most importantly, of philosophy as education. From the American transcendentalism of Emerson and Thoreau to Dewey's pragmatism, its central task was to reconstruct the role of philosophy in service to life; and, as Thoreau says in *Walden*, the task of a philosopher is to solve the problems of life not only theoretically but also practically (Thoreau 1992, p. 9). To this end, knowledge is, as Hilary Putnam says, to be used in service to “the problems of men.”

This paper will explore the implications of philosophy for life for education today in the tradition of Dewey's pragmatism and the American transcendentalism of Emerson and Thoreau.
(as revived by Stanley Cavell). In what Paul Standish calls the “closed economy” (Standish 2012) and in what Biesta calls the “knowledge economy” (Biesta 2010), the meaning of useful knowledge is being questioned anew. The situation is similar in Japan. The Council for the Implementation of Education Rebuilding has recently proposed a statement called, “Education for Realizing the Learning Society, Full Participation and the Revitalization of Local Communities” (2015, my translation). As much as its vision and language is benevolent for the creation of a society tolerant to diverse needs and responsive to the aspirations of those who want to keep learning, the ideas of use, practicality, activity and life are subordinated to the needs of the economy. While it envisions a quasi-Deweyan idea of ever-continuing growth and self-realization as a vision of lifelong learning, and while the significance of the Shutai-teki (active and autonomous) power of acquiring knowledge and skill is emphasized, the ideal of the human being envisioned here is the product of human resources thinking and is understood in terms of its utility for economic growth.

In the light of this, it is timely to reconsider the nature of American philosophy, especially as lip-service to this is sometimes paid in the rhetoric of this new, alleged practicality. Thus: What is useful knowledge for human beings? What is the task of philosophy in service of life?

In response to these questions, and in the spirit of Dewey’s “reconstruction in philosophy” (1921), American philosophy needs to be reconstructed such that it is not assimilated simply into “pragmatic” use. In this paper, I shall highlight an antifoundationalist idea of thinking in the tradition of American philosophy by characterizing it as “pragmatism on tiptoe,” and shall explore its orientation to a way of thinking that exceeds problem solving. A special focus will be given to the idea of light. Light has obviously been a powerful trope for the nature of thinking and education in the Western world, ranging from the light in the allegory of the Cave to the idea of clarity in analytical philosophy, and apparent also in the root of “phenomenology.” But it emerges in American philosophy in such a way as to prompt a different horizon of thought. I shall explore this especially by considering the multiple descriptions of light in Thoreau’s Walden (1854) and “Walking” (1862).

The distinctive thematization of twilight in American philosophy, accompanied by the idea of obscurity, will be shown to elucidate what Thoreau calls Beautiful Knowledge – which is said to be “a knowledge useful in a higher sense” (Thoreau 1991, p. 112). The twilight of American philosophy prompts a reconsideration of the meaning of thinking (especially of critical thinking), of knowledge, of the human subject and of democracy as a way of life. I shall argue that the experience of transcendence in the ordinary is the fruit of this economy of beautiful
knowledge and that it constitutes a promising way of enhancing the potential of American philosophy without its being fully assimilated to the terms of a global economy. This points neither to experiential education nor to a quasi-mystical realignment with nature – that is, it is not some kind of return to the woods. Rather education for useful knowledge is geared towards the cultivation of “Man Thinking” (Emerson), whose self-affirmative voice of the “I think” is a condition for the creation and criticism of democracy from within.

References


Dr Jeffrey Stickney

Wittgenstein on rule-entanglement, contradictions and arbitrariness in educational language-games: "Where will the harm come?"

Abstract

Wittgenstein's rule-following argument draws considerable attention: its policy-significance, very little. Exploring political aspects, I investigate cases of rule-entanglement in education: showing how teachers respond differently, carrying-on with fuzzy or sometimes contradictory rules. Confronted with rule-deviation, what justifies claims to 'sound'/unsound' implementation, or reasonable adaptation? Playing on Mighton's Possible Worlds scenario, I probe these questions on different planes of inquiry through five similar vignettes, including one focused on his ethically-aimed math training program.

Surveying the topic-space I first touch on fervent debate between Rorty and his critics, Putnam and McDowell, over 'solidarity' grounding judgment. Is sharing a 'sense'/sensibility' (fact/value) of 'pedagogic soundness' sufficient to uphold its veracity? Must soundness claims
be 'answerable to the world'? In terms of student diversity, which possible worlds beckon account? Wittgenstein's argument with Turing over harm done by contradictions and arbitrariness helps distinguish philosophical from mathematical problems. Applications follow:

(1) Contrasting "Theory of Knowledge" in the International Baccalaureate program with epistemology, arbitrariness in grammar results in playing different games. (2) Wittgenstein’s remarks on his own teaching efficacy demonstrate his distinction between empirical (or causal) and philosophical inquiries. (3) Finally, I explore controversy between contending paradigms of discovery learning and Mighton's guided-training in fundamentals, illustrating opposition between liberal-analytic definitions of teaching with training. Drawing on Medina, the problem of encountering alien practices is seen through the lens of 'logical insanity'. Faced with seemingly 'unsound' reforms, teacher resistance acts as healthy, conservative brakes; alternately, recalcitrance can normatively blind teachers to innovation, effectively stalling improvement in learning.

Jeff's full paper is available at:

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We hope you enjoy the conference. If you have any questions, please contact the Conference Organisers, Naomi Hodgson (naomihodgson@hotmail.com) or Paul Standish (paulzsandish@gmail.com) or pesgb@sasevents.co.uk. We look forward to seeing you at Gregynog.

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2 (Assessment Headquarters in Cardiff)