

AAP2008 Plenary Addresses

Sunday 6 July 2008 (7.30 – 8.55pm)

Auditorium, Storey Hall, 342 Swanston Street, Melbourne

Prof Sue Dodds – Wollongong University

Vulnerable Selves and Liberal Democracy

Recent work in democratic theory has emphasised the “deliberative turn” in politics, according to which legitimacy is associated with the transparency, inclusiveness, and justification of the deliberative processes involved in political decision-making (e.g. Habermas, Elster, Dryzek, Young, Gutmann). The re-instatement of public reasoning and justification by means of argument among citizens or their representatives striving towards collective goals has been seen by many progressive theorists as a strong corrective to those approaches to democracy that atomise preferences, generate adversarial contests, pre-frame the scope of the political, and merely aggregate—rather than realise the transformational possibilities for—individual interests. Deliberative democracy may be thought, on these grounds, to preserve the values of democratic equality and respect for the political autonomy of citizens, while avoiding some of the frequently criticised limitations of liberal individualism or crude preference majoritarianism.

In this paper, I wish to explore the relationship between the democratic citizen and the self or agent that is presupposed by the deliberative approach to democracy. I will argue that while deliberative democracy can be used to address some of the limitations of contemporary liberal theory, there is more work to be done to unpack the presuppositions of the self who exercises political deliberation as a citizen. I am particularly interested in articulating the limitations of the deliberative approach when it comes to addressing the political demands of human vulnerability. Drawing on the literature on dependency (Kittay, Lanoix), needs (Reader and Brock), capabilities (Nussbaum), and recognition (Anderson and Honneth) I will identify some of the ways in which theorising about the self shapes the scope of the ethical and or political, and hence determines which social forms are relevant to claims of justice. Ultimately, I gesture towards a theoretical approach of recognising human vulnerability as central to any defensible political theory.

Monday 7 July 2008 (9.00 – 10.25am)

Auditorium, Storey Hall, 342 Swanston Street, Melbourne

Prof Frank Jackson – La Trobe University, Princeton University, ANU

Meaning and the getting of information

Maps, diagrams, sentences and flags are alike in representing that things are thus and so. This is why they are invaluable sources of information about our world. They tell us where the landmines are and that Newton was wrong. What can we say of a general kind about the informational value of simple sentences containing proper names? I critically review some answers to this question and conclude with some observations about the implications of our discussion for competing theories of reference for names.

Monday 7 July 2008 (6.00 – 7.25pm)

Auditorium, Storey Hall, 342 Swanston Street, Melbourne

Prof. Rosi Braidotti – University of Utrecht

The Postsecular Turn

In this paper I will explore the so-called 'postsecular' turn from different but intersecting angles. These include the impact of extremism on all monotheistic religions in a global context of neo-conservative politics and perpetual war, as well as the quest for ethical values in ways that are attuned to the complexities and contradictions of our era.

The first part of my argument offers a sort of cartography of the postsecular discourses within feminist theory. The second develops the theoretical argument that the postsecular predicament stands for a vision of consciousness that links critique to affirmation, instead of negativity, and that it shows traces of residual spirituality.

Tuesday 8 July 2008 (5.30 – 6.55pm)

Auditorium, Storey Hall, 342 Swanston Street, Melbourne

Prof. Andrew Benjamin – Monash University

Animal Presence

In Section §5 of the Critique of the Power of Judgment Kant, in establishing the relation and necessary differentiation between the 'agreeable', the 'beautiful' and the 'good', formulates the nature of their interconnection in the following terms: 'Agreeableness is ..valid for nonrational animals; beauty is valid only for human beings, i.e. animal but also rational beings, but not merely for the latter (e.g. spirits), rather as beings who are at the same time animal; the good however is valid for every rational being in general.' This formulation locates the good, beauty and thus community as the point of separation between the human and the animal. However, while there is a necessary separation there is also a point of connection. Humans are 'at the same time' (zugleich) animals. In other words, there is within the human an already present animality. As such, there is the necessity that this original relation be thought philosophically.

In regards to the good, the rational, beauty and community therefore it is essential that the human exist without relation to the animal.

This occurs at the same time that there is the concession of the necessity of an already present recalcitrant animality and thus an original relation to the animal. The project of this paper will be to examine, starting with Kant's formulation, the presence of this twofold necessity

Wednesday 9 July 2008 (5.30 – 6.55pm)

Auditorium, Storey Hall, 342 Swanston Street, Melbourne

Prof. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord – University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

A Moral Argument Against Moral Dilemmas

Literature and life both offer compelling testimony to the (often depressingly) hard choices people face as they try to live morally decent lives. Among such hard choices are situations in which, apparently, no matter what one does, one does something morally wrong -- not just hard, sad, or wrenching. Hard choices of this sort have come to be called 'moral dilemmas'. Perhaps surprisingly, especially given literature and life, most moral theories in effect deny that moral dilemmas are possible. In defense of the denial, various formal and structural considerations have commonly been offered. I suggest that these standard considerations all miss the mark. Yet I go on to argue that there are good, distinctively moral, reasons for thinking there are no moral dilemmas -- life and literature notwithstanding -- even though there are choices so difficult one can hardly be expected to survive making them.

Thursday 10 July 2008 (9.00 – 10.25am)

Auditorium, Storey Hall, 342 Swanston Street, Melbourne

Prof. Richard Boyd – Cornell University

Science and Social Constitution: Reality, Social Construction and the Social Epistemology of Science

In science studies, and in the humanities generally, there often appears to be a fundamental dichotomy between "postmodernist" approaches which emphasize the social construction of concepts and theories and eschew notions like truth, knowledge and objectivity and "scientific realist" approaches which embrace such notions but reject an epistemological or metaphysical emphasis on "social construction." The dichotomy is a false one. Properly developed scientific realism implies the truth of (realist versions of) most postmodernist slogans and the insights of postmodernism are best understood on a realist construal.