

Virginia Tech Department of Philosophy
Matchette Conference
April 4-6, 2003: McBryde 113

**The Metaethics of Moral Status:
Perspectives on the Nature and Source of Human Value**

Speakers:

Kate Abramson (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)
Anne Margaret Baxley (Virginia Tech)
Stephen Darwall (University of Michigan)
William J. FitzPatrick (Virginia Tech)
Thomas Hill (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill)
Sarah Williams Holtman (University of Minnesota)
Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill)

Description:

The notion of an entity's *moral status* is among the most fundamental and pervasive of our moral concepts. Current moral debates over stem cell research or therapeutic cloning, for example, revolve largely around questions concerning the moral status of embryos—the sort of intrinsic importance they may have (or lack), making them worthy (or unworthy) of certain kinds of moral consideration—just as debates over abortion or animal rights have long dealt with questions about the moral status of fetuses or of non-human animals. And the idea of the moral status of persons is central to many accounts of our own fundamental rights and obligations to one another, placing it at the very heart of ethical thought.

Despite the pervasiveness of such appeals to moral status, however, there are many difficult questions about what such a status ultimately consists in and how claims about it are to be justified. If human beings possess the moral property of “inviolability” or of being “ends in themselves,” for example, how is that property related to the natural properties that seem relevant to it? Is it an objective fact about us, to be recognized and respected, that we have such a moral status? Or is it instead somehow constructed by some necessary procedure of practical reasoning, or projected on the basis of certain contingent sentiments? What are the ethical implications of these various metaethical views of moral status? The aim of the conference is to address such issues and to shed some focused light on this topic that is both so fundamentally important to our moral thinking and yet also so hard to treat in a philosophically satisfying way.

Schedule: All of the following events are *free and open to the public*.

FRIDAY, April 4th

- 3:30: Welcome and Refreshments (McBryde 113)
- 4:00: Opening Remarks: Joe Pitt (Head, Dept. of Philosophy)
- 4:10-5:50: Hill: “Assumptions Behind Kant's Humanity Formula”

SATURDAY, April 5th

- 8:40: coffee and donuts (McBryde 113)
- 9:00-10:35: Darwall: “Dignity, Respect, and the Second-Person Standpoint”
- 10:45-12:20: FitzPatrick: “Human Dignity and Ethical Realism”
- Lunch Break
- 1:45-3:20: Abramson: “Humean Virtues and Animal Passions”
- 3:30-5:05: Holtman: “Agents, Citizens, and the Appalachians”

SUNDAY, April 6th (**NOTE: DAYLIGHT SAVINGS CHANGE!)

- 8:40: coffee and donuts (McBryde 113).
- 9:00-10:35: Baxley: “The Unconditional Value of Humanity: Kant's Rationale for Treating Humanity as an End in Itself”
- 10:45-12:20: Sayre-McCord, “Rational Agency and Kant's Argument for Its Privileged Moral Status”

Hotel Information for Blacksburg (and Christiansburg):

(Rates are approximate, for one person, and may vary; some include cont. breakfast. Note that arrangements have already been made for the speakers.)

The hotel on campus (Donaldson Brown Hotel) is already booked with other events, as is the nearby Sheraton Four Points Inn. Here are several convenient hotels in town:

- **Red Lion Inn** (540-552-7770): \$64 (\$57 with AAA); within about a half mile of campus.
- **AmeriSuites** (540-552-5636): \$89 (\$80 with AAA); also within about a half mile of campus.
- **Microtel** (540-381-0500): \$43 (\$39 with AAA); about 2 or 3 miles from campus.
- **Hampton Inn** (540-381-5874): (\$72-95, -10% with AAA); also 2 to 3 miles.
- **Comfort Inn Blacksburg** (540-951-1500): \$77 (\$70 with AAA); 2 miles.
- **Ramada Limited** (540-951-1330): \$75 (\$68 with AAA); 2 miles.

DIRECTIONS:

To reach the campus from Interstate 81 (southbound and northbound):

Take **Exit 118** to reach the exit ramps for all three of the exits (118A,B,C). There is only one initial exit ramp serving all three exits, so be sure to take it. (Missing the ramp means a trip north to Exit 128 or south to Exit 114 to turn around!) Then Take **Exit 118B** onto U.S. 460 West (toward Bluefield). Follow the signs for Blacksburg/Virginia Tech. After a few miles you’ll come to a traffic light at **Southgate Drive**. Turn **right** onto Southgate Drive. The **Visitor Information Center** is a small white building a half-mile on the right, just *before* Duck Pond Drive. Get a visitor parking permit there for use on Friday afternoon. (Permits aren’t needed over

the weekend, beginning at 5:00 Friday afternoon.) They also have free campus maps for you at the center.

When you come out of the Visitor's Center, take **Duck Pond Dr.** into campus (it's pretty much just across Southgate from the visitor's center). At the top of the hill, turn **right** onto **Washington St.** Take Washington to **Kent St.**, and turn **left** onto Kent. This takes you by the bookstore and library, and just keep following it straight up the hill, past the Drillfield. Near the top of the hill, it will curve to the right, going past Torgersen Hall. Keep going straight (this is now **Stanger St.**) and you'll pass **McBryde Hall** on the left (the conference is in **McBryde 113**, downstairs); you'll come to large parking lots further down on both the left and the right, and should be able to find a spot in one of them. If for some reason they're especially full, you'll see more, large parking lots further down the hill. (If you need assistance, the Philosophy Department is on the second floor of Major Williams Hall, right across from McBryde, on Stanger St.)

For online campus Maps: <http://www.unirel.vt.edu/map/index.html>

Notes on Speakers:

Kate Abramson (Asst. Professor of Philosophy, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign) specializes in the work of Hume, contemporary ethics, and the history of modern philosophy, and she is also interested in philosophical issues concerning feminism and aesthetics. She is the author of "Hume on Cultural Conflicts of Values," "Correcting our Sentiments about Hume's Moral Point of View," and "Sympathy and the Project of Hume's Second Enquiry," and is currently working on a book arguing for a new view of Hume's place in contemporary ethics, focusing on questions of moral judgment, ethical normativity and moral motivation. She was the winner of the 1998 Jean Hampton Prize for her paper "Hume on Cultural Conflicts."

Anne Margaret Baxley (Asst. Professor of Philosophy, Virginia Tech) works in the history of ethics, ethical theory, and Kant, especially Kant's ethics. She is the author of "Autocracy and Autonomy" (forthcoming in *Kant-Studien*, 2003), "The Beautiful Soul and the Autocratic Agent: Schiller's and Kant's 'Children of the House'" (forthcoming in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 2003), and "Does Kantian Virtue Amount to Mere Continence?" (forthcoming in *Review of Metaphysics*, 2003), among other articles, and is working on a comparison of Kant's moral psychology to that of Aristotle.

Stephen Darwall (John Dewey Collegiate Professor of Philosophy, University of Michigan) has done important work on the foundations of ethics, moral psychology, moral theory, and the history of these subjects, primarily in the 17th and 18th centuries. He is the author of *Impartial Reason* (Cornell, 1983), a theory of practical reason, *The British Moralists and the Internal 'Ought': 1640-1740* (Cambridge, 1995), a discussion of 17th and 18th century theories of obligation and motivation, and *Philosophical Ethics* (Westview, 1988), a textbook in moral philosophy. His presentation will in part take up the question of what sort of reciprocally recognized moral status two people implicitly commit themselves to when they make second-personal claims of each other.

William J. FitzPatrick (Asst. Professor of Philosophy, Virginia Tech) works primarily in ethical theory, particularly on defending and developing a broadly Aristotelian form of ethical realism as an alternative to both neo-Kantian constructivism and neo-Humean expressivism. He is the author, with Eric Watkins, of "O'Neill and Korsgaard on the Construction of Normativity," among other articles on ethics, as well as *Teleology and the Norms of Nature* (Garland, 2000), and he received the 2000 Aristotle Prize from the Metaphysical Society of America for his paper "Metaphysics and Ethical Realism."

Thomas Hill (Kenan Professor of Philosophy, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill) has written extensively in ethics, the history of ethics, and political philosophy. His *Respect, Pluralism and Justice*,

has just appeared, while his *Autonomy and Self-Respect* and *Dignity and Practical Reason*, were published in 1991 and 1992, respectively. He is currently working on a new edition of Kant's *Groundwork*, with A. Zweig, for Oxford University Press.

Sarah Williams Holtman (Asst. Professor of Philosophy, University of Minnesota) has published papers on Kant's practical philosophy and on Kantian approaches to contemporary political issues, and is working on a book entitled *Justice, Civic Virtue and Social Grace: Toward Kantian Community*, which develops a Kantian theory of justice and civic virtue capable of addressing vexed contemporary problems (such as public school funding). Her presentation will address the question whether a constructivist approach, which she favors, can give us an adequate and appealing foundation for human (or civil) rights and in how the Kantian constructivist might adequately account for our sense that non-human animals have significant moral status.

Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (Bowman and Gordon Gray Professor, and Department Chair, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill) has published numerous articles on moral theory, epistemology, and modern philosophy, and has edited *Essays on Moral Realism* (Cornell University Press, 1988). He is currently working on moral realism, on Hume's moral philosophy, and contemporary contractarianism.