The 19th Annual University of Toronto Graduate Philosophy Conference

November 15-16, 2019

Jackman Humanities Building
170 St. George Street
Room 418 (12:00 – 6:30pm, Friday, Nov.15th)
Room 100 (9:30am – 6:00pm, Saturday, Nov.16th)

Reconstructing Reason:

developing the concept of reason through history

five instruction unto
those who cannot procure
it for themselves.

Keynote speakers:

Susan Haack

Robert Brandom

https://www.torontophilgradconf.wordpress.com

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Conference Description

What is reason? The concept of reason has been central to the practice and self-conception of philosophy throughout its history. And yet, the way philosophers have understood this concept has changed dramatically over time.

In the ancient and medieval traditions, reason, or logos was regarded both as a principle of thought and as a principle of being. To philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, the activity of reasoning was not merely the preferred method of philosophy but was seen equally to be its highest aim and purpose. Through reasoning one could partake in the thoughts of the divine and comprehend the true nature of reality. This traditional conception was radically transformed in the early modern period, first at the hands of thinkers like Galileo and Descartes, and later in a more complete way by Kant, as the idea of reason as a constitutive principle of the world was replaced with a conception of reason as a merely human, purely regulative faculty giving form and unity to the otherwise unstructured data of experience. This revisionary, largely deflationary, trend has continued since the middle of the nineteenth century as a chain of discoveries in fields as diverse as evolutionary biology, anthropology, physics and mathematics has cast doubt on the existence of a distinct faculty of the mind, "reason," that ought to be afforded ultimate authority in matters of human knowledge and conduct.

Although philosophers today cannot avoid speaking of "reason," "reasoning" and "the reasons for things" there is little consensus about how such concepts fit together systematically. Indeed, many suggest that the hope for any such systematic unity is misplaced. Where reason once named a faculty it now names an imperfect, socio-biological mechanism whose function is determined not by directedness towards truth but towards adaptive advantage. Where reason once named a system of universally binding norms, it now names a plurality of frameworks, formal languages, codified practices, and "styles" of reasoning, many of which are either incompatible or incommensurable with our own contemporary practices.

What are the implications of viewing the history of philosophy and the shift in our understanding of the concept of reason in this way? What attitude should the contemporary philosopher adopt towards the epistemic status of her own claims when viewed as products of shifting historical circumstance? How are we to understand the transitions between distinct rational practices? Are their causes rational or irrational? Does viewing the history of reason in the way sketched here preclude us from casting judgment on matters of historical injustice? How have philosophers in the past thought about the historical dimension of reason? What opportunities are available for methodological collaborations between philosophers, historians, and scholars from other disciplines concerning the history of the concept of reason?

Our conference addresses these and many other exciting questions.

Keynote Speakers

Susan Haack (University of Miami)

Susan Haack is a leading figure in the philosophy of science, language, logic, and epistemology. Her work – deeply influenced by the American pragmatist tradition – encompasses both philosophical and legal concerns regarding the nature of evidence, belief, reasoning, and truth. Her books include *Defending Science—Within Reason* and *Evidence Matters: Science, Proof, and Truth in the Law*. Dr. Haack's recent work documents the fascinating way social and historical circumstances influence the development of the meaning of scientific and legal concepts and shows how this tendency can inform our understanding of rationality.

Keynote address:

Reconceptualizing Rationality: the Growth of Meaning and Limits of Formalism

Abstract:

Narrowly formal models, Haack argues, are inadequate to the cognitive flexibility real rationality requires. Why is this? As our knowledge and our experience grow, Haack explains, concepts take on new and richer meaning. Recent (post-Fregean) philosophers of language have paid little attention to this phenomenon; and radical philosophers like Feyerabend and Rorty took for granted that meaning-change is a threat to rationality. But thinkers in the classical pragmatist tradition—Peirce in philosophy of science and, more implicitly, Holmes in legal theory—recognized the significance of growth of meaning, and understood how it can contribute to the progress of science and to the adaptation of a legal system to changing circumstances. This paper develops these insights, and illustrates them by reference (1) to the growth of meaning of "DNA" from the identification of "nuclein" to the discovery of mtDNA almost a century later, and (2) to the growth of meaning of "the establishment of religion" in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution from its ratification in 1791 to the present day.

Keynote Speakers

Robert B. Brandom (University of Pittsburgh)

Robert Brandom works in the philosophy of language, logic, German idealism, and neo-pragmatism. His theory of reasoning known as "inferentialism" has been widely influential both inside and outside the discipline and treats many of the leading issues in contemporary philosophy in a way that is both systematic and historically illuminating. Dr. Brandom's most recent book, *A Spirit of Trust*, gives a new and provocative interpretation of the distinctively social and historical development of reason in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Keynote address:

Magnanimity, Heroism, and Agency: Recognition as Recollection

Abstract:

Hegel thinks that the most important event in human history the single biggest thing that ever happened to us is the extended transition from long-standing traditional forms of life to distinctively modern ones. The great thinkers of the Enlightenment, and in particular the philosophers in the canonical tradition that leads from Descartes to Kant, worked out ideas that articulate the characteristically modern understanding both of our cognitive, practical, and political activity, and of the world we know about and act in and on. But Hegel was the first to see modernity whole: the first to see those new Enlightenment modes of understanding as of a piece with the massive rolling changes in social, political, and economic institutions that gave rise to them and to which they gave voice, the first to see the Enlightenment as the form of consciousness and self-consciousness appropriate to a new world and a new way of being in the world.

Schedule

Day One

Fri., Nov.15th Jackman Humanities Building **Room 418**

12:00pm – 12:15pm	Greeting and Opening Remarks by conference organizers Sean Dudley & Matthew Delhey
12:15pm – 1:15pm	Bianca Crewe (University of British Columbia) "Ideology and the Politics of Reason in Early Analytic Philosophy" Comments by Greg Horne (University of Toronto)
1:30pm – 2:30pm	Lucian Ionel (University of Pittsburgh) "Reason: substantive and adverbial" Comments by Sean Dudley (University of Toronto)
2:45pm – 3:45pm	Joshua Brecka (Ryerson University) "Lewis Carrol on Reasoning" Comments by Matthew Delhey (University of Toronto)
4:00pm – 5:00pm	Erik Nelson (Dalhousie University) "What Reason Requires for Morality: A Kantian Approach to Proto-Morality in Nonhuman Animals" Comments by Katherine Crone (University of Toronto)
5:00pm – 6:30pm	**Keynote**: Susan Haack (University of Miami) "Reconceptualizing Rationality: The Growth of Meaning and the Limits of Formalism"
6:30pm – 8:30pm	Reception (Philosophy Department, Jackman Humanities Building Room 417 & 418)

Schedule

Day Two

Sat., Nov.16th Jackman Humanities Building **Room 100**

9:30am—10:00am	Coffee & Pastries
10:00am—11:00am	Eskil Elling (Northwestern University) "Montaigne and the Problem of Skeptical Subjectivity" Comments by Alexandra Gustafson (University of Toronto)
11:15am—12:15pm	David Kretz (University of Chicago) "Translation Action at the End of a World" Comments by Kristen Beard (University of Toronto)
12:15pm—1:45pm	Lunch (Catered)
1:45pm—2:45pm	Rebecca Harrison (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor) "Railton on Responding to Reasons" Comments by Paolo Camporese (McMaster University)
3:00pm—4:00pm	Caroline Bowman (New York University) "Hegel's Account of Social Freedom" Comments by Dylan Shaul (University of Toronto)
4:30—6:00pm	**Keynote:** Robert Brandom (University of Pittsburgh) "Magnanimity, Heroism, and Agency: Recognition as Recollection
7:00pm—9:00pm	Banquet Dinner @ Via Mercanti 87 Elm St, Toronto, ON M5G 1X8)

Graduate Abstracts

Caroline Bowman (New York University)
"Hegel's Account of Social Freedom"

This paper examines Fred Neuhouser's account of what I call Hegel's "Social Freedom Thesis": the claim that an agent's identifying with social roles constitutes a kind of freedom. I argue that Neuhouser fails to reconstruct a satisfying argument for the Social Freedom Thesis because he fails to vindicate Hegel's strong claim that a social world that allows for social identification (SI) is necessary for an agent to be fully free. I argue that Neuhouser's account can be supplemented by appealing to the Kantian roots of Hegel's theory of freedom. According to this line of thought, SI constitutes a type of freedom because it allows an agent to overcome the heteronomy of her own desires. This is because, for Hegel (as for Kant), to overcome the threat of external constraint by one's desires, one must act through practical reason alone. But for Hegel (departing from Kant), acting through practical reason in a determinate way requires occupying concrete social roles.

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Joshua Brecka (Ryerson University)
"Lewis Carrol on Reason: the Logical and the Psychological"

Philosophers differ on exactly what point Lewis Carroll was making in his short story "What the Tortoise Said to Achilles". There are at least two interpretations, each of which highlight a different problem. What I call the "logical problem" has to do with the justification of deductive inference. The "psychological problem" has to do with understanding how it is that a belief can be based on another belief. While previous authors have attempted to give solutions to one problem or the other, I argue that the real issue that Carroll's story points to has to do with understanding how the logical and the psychological meet up.

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Bianca Crewe (University of British Columbia)
"Ideology and the Politics of Reason in Early Analytic Philosophy"

Intellectual history in the 20th century charts the rise of scientific philosophy, the methodological germ of the dominant philosophical tradition in contemporary Anglo-American institutions. In 1928, the Vienna Circle articulate this methodological commitment in their manifesto, _The Scientific Conception of the World_, which invokes a cluster of epistemological attitudes including a turn away from metaphysics and a shift towards envisioning philosophy as an activity or method. Here, I examine the rise of scientific philosophy, particularly as it appears in the work of Hans Reichenbach, a figure peripheral to the Vienna Circle, and highlight the implications of philosophy so-conceived with respect to the knowing subject. I do so in order to draw out what John McCumber refers to as "the politics of reason" and in the context of the major ideological divide of that century—namely, Marxism and capitalism. I argue that focus on the vision of the epistemic agent underlying Reichenbach's scientific philosophy and logical positivism reveals the alignments between this tradition and certain presuppositions of capitalist ideology. Furthermore, I claim such a characterization is entwined with a particular methodology or thought style, as articulated by Karl Mannheim in his sociology of knowledge. This implicit methodology structures the contemporary discipline and can, I suggest, account for lasting difficulties in mobilizing analytic philosophy as a tool for social justice.

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Eskil Elling (Northwestern University)
"Montaigne and the Problem of Skeptical Subjectivity"

The Essays of Michel de Montaigne have often been hailed as the birthplace of modern subjectivity, primarily because of their rich analyses of the world seen from an intensely personal perspective. This is in no small part due to their role in the revival of skepticism in the early-modern period. At the same time, Montaigne's skepticism is seen by some as an impediment to the full deployment of the modern, rational subject. According to this criticism, while Montaigne's writings are an admirable example of the practice of subjectivity, his skepticism ultimately deprives him of the resources to formulate a satisfactory theory of the subject, a theory which would only see the light half a century later with Descartes. Drawing on Maurice Merleau-Ponty, I argue that the contradictory nature of experience is central to the subjectivity presented by Montaigne. In the light of this, any attempt to do away with such contradiction, for instance by reducing subjectivity to either the soul or the body, would belie subjective experience. Montaigne, then, does not refrain from saying what subjectivity is because his skepticism blocks him from understanding the foundation of subjectivity. He refrains because, to him, the groundless suspension characteristic of the skeptical attitude is the place where subjectivity is expressed, and even justified, most fully. As such, Montaigne offers us an interesting glimpse of the limits of the rational subject. In this way, he attempts, among other things, to make us aware of the historical conditions under which the deployment of rationality takes place. I will attempt to show how his conscious employment of a certain aesthetic form, that of the essay, is crucial to this project.

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Rebecca Harrison (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor)
"Railton on Responding to Reasons"

What does it take to respond to a reason? The capacity to be guided by reasons – to treat a fact as counting in favor (or against) an action or attitude – is often thought to be a core component of rationality. Peter Railton argues that creatures can become rationally attuned to reasons through experience-based learning. In this paper, I will argue that Railton's view does not capture the normative dimension of what it takes to respond to a reason. While Railton does explain how cognizers can intelligently act in accordance with reason-making considerations, his theory does not capture what it would take for a cognizer to respond to reasons. I argue that two objections which have been raised in the related debate about what it takes to be guided by a norm – the normativity objection and the gerrymandering objection – pose problems for Railton's account of what it takes to respond to reasons. Because Railton suggests that a cognizer counts as responding to reasons when it exhibits a complex pattern of behavior, his theory misses an important part of what it takes to treat a fact as counting in favor (or against) an attitude or action – the capacity to treat apt as correct and inapt responses as incorrect. It is this capacity to (nondeliberatively) recognize the difference between a correct and incorrect taking of a fact as a reason, I argue, which distinguishes acting in accordance with reason-making considerations from genuinely responding to reasons.

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Lucian Ionel (University of Pittsburgh)
"Reason: substantive and adverbial"

Matthew Boyle has distinguished between additive and transformative theories of rationality. While additive theories conceive of reason as a special human capacity for reflection supplementary to the perceptive and desiderative capacities humans share with animals with no further ado, transformative theories argue that reason consists in the particular way human beings perceive and desire: these capacities differ from the sensitive capacities of non-human animals insofar as they are permeated by rationality. Against this backdrop, I will make a further, complementary distinction between substantive and adverbial theories of rationality. The substantive theory is based on a deep-set assumption about the transformative agency of reason, according to which rationality must already be formed in itself in order to be able to transform the sensitive capacities in rational terms. Correspondingly, the substantive theory can give up tracing rationality back to a special power, while nevertheless considering reason to be sui generis, i.e., its principles of functioning as self-sufficient. The adverbial theory of rationality, which goes back to Aristotle's understanding of logos, holds that reason not only defines the way in which human beings perceive and desire but also that rational capacities are themselves constituted by means of the activities in which they are exercised, i.e., formed in the process in which they form our specific animality.

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David Kretz (University of Chicago)
"Translation Action at the End of a World"

In a moment of historical crisis, one needs to reason well. Yet often historical crises mean precisely the breakdown of those social practices and institutions in which the central concepts of our practical reasoning are embedded and, consequently, a crisis in practical reasoning. What may one hope for in such a situation? Many thinkers (Rorty, Heidegger) have answered that, absent metaphysical foundations to fall back onto, we can only hope for great poets, broadly understood, as genial creators of new conceptual resources. On this poetic paradigm, the arrival of such a genius is largely a matter of chance (or fate), the act of creation irrational, and the past something to overcome in agonistic struggle. This paper proposes the translator as an alternative. Translation, I argue, as an ethical and rational, intra-cultural practice of inter-cultural correlation, offers a model for practical reasoning through and within large-scale crises of practical reasoning — within the bounds of a post-metaphysical, pragmatist outlook. The conceptual proposal is fleshed out through discussions of an ethnographic case study.

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Erik Nelson (Dalhousie University)
"What Reason Requires for Morality: A Kantian Approach to Proto-Morality in Nonhuman Animals"

The question of whether or not nonhuman animals are capable of being moral is a highly contentious issue that tends to split along sentimentalist and rationalist approaches to ethics. While Humean influenced thinkers, such as Frans de Waal, argue that morality is dependent upon moral emotions which they argue nonhuman animals are capable of, Kantian influenced philosophers, such as Christine Korsgaard, have argued that morality depends upon rationality, which they often equate with metacognitive capabilities which they attribute exclusively to humans. Normative approaches that are not dependent upon metacognitive capabilities, like Kristin Andrews' account, face a further difficulty, in that they are unable to distinguish between moral and conventional norms. Accepting Andrews' arguments against the necessity of metacognition, I argue that Kant's "Doctrine of Virtue" provides a way to argue for a version of proto-morality that can distinguish between moral and conventional norms.

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Acknowledgements

We wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit River. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

170 St George St, Toronto, ON

M5R 2M8

torontophilgradconf@gmail.com