

**Program
of the
First Annual Conference of the
University at Albany Philosophical Association**

Epistemology

**April 12th, 2008
at the University at Albany
in the Humanities bldg. Room 354**

9:00-9:55 – Colin Caret, University of Connecticut; *Not-So-Easy Knowledge*, Commentator – Chris Deleo.

Reliabilists are committed to basic knowledge, i.e. knowledge produced by a belief source without the antecedent knowledge that that source is reliable. Jonathan Vogel and Stewart Cohen argue that this commits the reliabilist to the possibility of ‘easy’ knowledge concerning the reliability of our belief sources. The irony is that they assume something just as egregious as what they are charging the reliabilist with: that we can easily, introspectively identify the cognitive processes which are causally implicated in producing our beliefs. I argue that the reliabilist has independent reasons to reject this assumption. Knowledge of the mechanisms of cognition is not-so-easy knowledge.

10:00-10:55 – David Morrow, The City University of New York; *Ethical Intuitionism and the Case of the Mysterious Mental Thermometer*, Commentator – Sean Hesimann.

Rational intuitionism has recently reemerged as an important theory of moral epistemology. Contemporary intuitionists offer a sophisticated theory of self-evidence to support their belief in self-evident moral principles. However, their “soft” notion of self-evidence commits them to what I call the “Thermometer View” of intuition, according to which humans possess a cognitive capacity that, in the right circumstances, reliably detects the truth of unobvious self-evident propositions. I show that their argument for this view fails, and that this capacity is psychologically mysterious and implausible. I suggest that much philosophical intuition in general may also rely on the Thermometer View.

11:00-11:55 – Kirk Michaelian, University of Massachusetts Amherst, *Generative Memory*, Commentator – Kevin Olbrys.

This paper defends radical generationism, the thesis that memory can be generative (and not merely preservative) of epistemic justification in virtue of being generative (and not merely preservative) of both beliefs and their contents. Radical generationism goes considerably further than the view defended recently by Lackey, a moderate generationism according to which memory can be generative of epistemic justification in virtue of being generative of beliefs but not of their contents. My argument for radical generationism is thoroughly empirical: I argue for an updated version of Martin and Deutscher's causal theory of memory as a generalization of the view of memory as constructive which emerges from psychology; radical generationism follows from the causal theory of constructive memory (plus reliabilism about justification).

12:00 – Lunch

1:00-1:55 – Clancy Smith, Kent State University; *The Skeptical Merry-Go-Round: An Analysis of Montague's Cycle of Realism and the Notion of Epistemological Paradigms*, Commentator – Kelly Hills.

Following Montague's articulation of the changing permutations of realism, we find that in every stage of development, be it direct or representational or "naïve," the same skeptical conundrums re-emerge, most critically, the so-called "ego-centric predicament." After a brief analysis of this historical development, Montague concedes that epistemological theories appear to be bound to some "perpetual, skeptical merry-go-round." I conclude by forwarding the notion of an alternative epistemological paradigm, offering a possible solution to Montague's dilemma via the combined work of Peirce and Dewey in constructing a new, "inferential" paradigm based upon the Psychological Standpoint which simultaneously maintains the holistic integrity of experience and illuminates precisely how it is that dualistic epistemologies keep falling prey to the same predicament.

2:00-2:55 – Kristoffer Ahlstrom, University of Massachusetts Amherst; *Why Reliabilism is the New Internalism*, Commentator – Dan Soucy.

In the present paper, it is argued that a proper understanding of our best psychological theories about introspection suggest that it neither constitutes a suitable tool for epistemic self-evaluation, nor a good candidate for being invoked in an analysis of justification—contrary to what has been assumed by what I will refer to as Introspective-Based Access Internalism. Moreover, against the background of a more plausible construal of cognitive accessibility, it is argued that we find promising candidates for cognitively accessible factors within externalism. In fact, if accessibility is as important a desideratum as epistemologists have assumed, reliabilism is the new internalism.

3:00-3:55 – Andrew Spear, University at Buffalo; *Resurrecting Internalism: Conditions of Cognitive Sanity and the Internalist Credo*, Commentator – Justin Weil.

Laurence Bonjour has recently acknowledged the need for what he calls "background conditions" on internalist epistemic justification, an admission he takes to involve some concession to externalism. Hilary Kornblith argues that this move reveals the incoherence of internalism and amounts to a view indistinguishable from externalist reliabilism, thus signaling "the death of epistemological internalism." I think that the funeral arrangements are being made prematurely, and that internalism of the sort under consideration can survive Kornblith's challenge. The balance of this essay will be an internalist response, focusing primarily on Kornblith's charge of incoherence and ending with some brief responses to his indistinguishability claim.

4:00 – 5:30 **Keynote Address:** Hilary Kornblith; University of Massachusetts, Amherst; *Belief in the Face of Controversy*

We all have beliefs about controversial matters. In this paper, I focus on the epistemic status of beliefs held in the face of disagreement with epistemic peers, those who are comparably well informed, intelligent and so on. We disagree with our epistemic peers on a wide range of matters, including moral and political questions, as well as philosophical questions of all sorts. Should the recognition of such disagreement lead us to moderate our opinions on these matters, or is it epistemically legitimate to go on believing as we do in the face of such controversy? I argue that a proper appreciation of the epistemic significance of disagreement would force substantial changes in our beliefs on a very wide range of subjects.