

MAP Workshop on Social and Political Philosophy (Spring 2018)

Abstracts:

“On Spectacle”

[Ashley Atkins](#) (Western Michigan University)

Dana Schutz's “Open Casket” provoked considerable controversy upon being exhibited at last year's Whitney Biennial. Schutz, whose painting revisits the open casket viewing of Emmett Till's lynched body, was said to have made a spectacle of black death and was accused---by those calling for the painting's destruction---of attempting (and failing) to perform the public gesture that Mamie Till Bradley performed in exhibiting her son's body. I want to think through some of the complexities that have been brought to light by these deeply felt criticisms and, in particular, to suggest that many of these criticisms reflect misunderstandings of Mamie Till Bradley's gesture, some relating to its relationship to the tradition of lynching and to the notion of spectacle associated with it. In particular, I want to focus attention on why these critics have failed to countenance the possibility that the position assumed by Schutz (both as artist and citizen) is that of a mourner and that she is attempting not to reproduce but to respond to Bradley's invitation to see what she saw.

“Why Second Thoughts Are Not Good Enough: The Kantian Dimension of Charles Mills’s Black Radical Liberalism”

[Elvira Basevich](#) (University of Michigan, Dearborn)

Charles Mills has waged a powerful challenge to political liberals of all stripes. Most notably, in his recent work, *Black Rights/White Wrongs*, he revisits his central idea of “subperson” for theorizing racial subordination in modern liberal societies and clarifies how the idea of the “subperson” is foundational to racial liberalism. Racial liberalism demarcates citizens’ standing according to membership in racial groups, with whites exclusively possessing the full schedules of the rights and privileges morally appropriate to citizenship. In response to Mills’s challenge to Kant’s moral and political philosophy, Pauline Kleingeld and Lucy Allais have come to the defense of Kant, while also acknowledging his racism. Against Mills, both argue that Kant is an inconsistent universalist. In this talk, I argue that both Kleingeld and Allais miss the point of Mills’s project: which normative resources are necessary to dismantle racial liberalism? For Mills, the Kantian conception of non-domination, grounded in the idea of moral personhood, counters the racist institutional status of “subperson.” According to Mills, the idea of a subperson is a necessary starting point to eliminate racism, but one that may require normative resources that go beyond Kant’s moral and political philosophy. In this talk, I show why second thoughts are not good enough to dismantle racial liberalism and explore what kind of additional normative resources are necessary.

“The Pragmatics of Ambiguous Consent”

[Gretchen Ellefson](#) (Northwestern University)

In recent years, a discussion around the importance of sexual consent has gained a great deal of momentum. I take up a small corner of this conversation and attempt to understand the phenomenon I call ambiguous consent, in which one party feels confident that his partner consented to sexual activity, while the other party does not think she consented to the activity. I claim that consent generally involves communication (and often linguistic communication), and thus, ambiguous consent should be understandable as a linguistic phenomenon. I'll argue that in order to adequately understand ambiguous consent, we must understand the relative power each participant has in the scenario as a part of the linguistic context of the exchange.

“When to Not Enforce the Law in Over-Policed Neighborhoods”

Alec Sculley (Western Michigan University)

The prima facie duty not to unjustly violate the self-ownership of individuals produces a conflict in obligation. This is because the duty to act justly in temporally local ways is often incompatible with the duty to act in ways that are sensitive to historical injustice. The conflict between local and historical justice can be reconciled by not enforcing the law when not enforcing the law does the least harm to self-ownership. As it turns out, not enforcing the law is obligatory when historical injustice sufficiently contributes to the commission of a local injustice; and when to enforce the law is to exacerbate tensions between law enforcement and communities historically disadvantaged by the discriminatory enforcement of law.

Schedule:

Alec Sculley 11:15-12:30

Lunch 12:30-1:15

Gretchen Ellefson 1:15-2:30

Break 2:30-2:45

Elvira Basevich 2:45-4

Break 4-4:15

Ashley Atkins 4:15-5:30

Dinner 7:00 (Hunan Gardens)