THEORY

AND ANTI-THEORY

IN ETHICS

A Two-Day Workshop on Philosophy and the Nature of Morality

Hosted by Flinders University of South Australia
Monday 15 and Tuesday 16 April 2013

It is widely assumed by philosophers that morality stands in need of theoretical systematisation, epistemic justification and metaphysical foundations. Debates in normative ethics are typically a shoot out between Kantianism, consequentialism and virtue ethics, each claiming the best theorisation of morality on these three scores. An upshot is that even very basic moral views can be made hostage to the outcome of theoretical inquiries. Some of the most important convictions of people’s lives (for example that the life of a severely handicapped child is more important than that of a dog, or that it would be doing a grave wrong to the child to kill it) are thus
cast in a speculative mode as ‘intuitions’, making them vulnerable to theoretical inquiry. These debates also usually assume, *inter alia* that morality is *naturalistic* in the sense of being based in some way on pre-moral interests like sentience, desire, rational autonomy and flourishing; that judgments are *universalizable* in the sense that if two agents are in the same ‘morally relevant circumstances’ they enjoy the same permissions and are subject to the same obligations; that particular moral judgments should be codified in a system of general principles; that the only significant form of moral responsibility is that for an agent’s free and deliberate actions; and that morality is sovereign over other forms of value.

But some traditions have sought to challenge the above picture of morality in various of the respects mentioned. Wittgensteinians like Cora Diamond and Raimond Gaita have attacked naturalism by defending a sense of human fellowship that is not reducible to naturalizable features like sentience, rationality, etc. Platonists like Iris Murdoch, R F Holland and, again, Gaita have defended a form of absolute, non-naturalizable goodness. Bernard Williams has denied that responsibility attaches exclusively to free, deliberate actions, and, famously, has also contested morality’s claim to be sovereign over all serious value. Williams, Peter Winch and David Wiggins have challenged the doctrine of universalizability. And particularists like Jonathan Dancy have questioned the assumption that morality can or should be regimented into principles. Nearly all of these authors reject the idea that morality must be subject to some general theoretical and impartial justification, on pain of irrationality. Philosophers sympathetic to some or all of these challenges are among those sometimes called ‘anti-theorists’.
The papers at this workshop will debate these and other issues that divide theorists and anti-theorists in a format that will provide the opportunity for detailed discussion. On the Monday there will be four speakers, allocated to time slots of an hour and a half each, allowing 45 minutes for paper presentation and 45 minutes for discussion. Then on Tuesday there will be an extended ‘discussion session’ where the speakers and attendees will pursue the themes from the previous day in a relaxed, relatively unstructured format that allows for intensive discussion.

**Monday 15 April**

8-45am: Welcome.

9-00am: Garrett Cullity (University of Adelaide) ‘Stupid Goodness’.

10.30am: Morning Tea.

11.00am: Craig Taylor (Flinders University) ‘Impartial Morality and Universalizability’.

12.30pm: Lunch.

2.00pm: Joe Mintoff (University of Newcastle) ‘Why Moral Theory?’

3.30pm: Afternoon tea

4.00pm: Andrew Gleeson (Flinders University) ‘Moral Justification’.
5.30pm: Close.

7.00pm: Workshop Dinner, venue TBA.

**Tuesday 16 April**

The ‘comments’ on this day are not full-blown papers, but brief remarks aimed at stimulating discussion of the papers from day one.

9.00am: Discussion starting with comments from Christine Swanton (University of Auckland).

10.30am: Morning Tea.

11.00: Discussion starting with comments from Christopher Cordner (University of Melbourne).

12.30 Lunch.

Discussion can then continue after lunch, and indeed for the rest of the day if we feel up to it!

Lunch and morning and afternoon tea on Monday, and lunch and morning tea on Tuesday, are provided free of charge. The dinner on Monday night will be about $17-19 for a main (more for fish) with further charge for drinks etc.

**Speakers for Day 1**
Garrett Cullity is the Hughes Professor of Philosophy at the University of Adelaide. He taught for several years at the University of St Andrew’s after completing his doctorate at Oxford under the supervision of Derek Parfit. He joined the philosophy department at Adelaide in 2001. He is the author of *The Moral Demands of Affluence* (Clarendon Press, 2004) and is now writing a second book defending a form of ethical pluralism. He has published many papers in ethics and practical reasoning. He is the current president of the Australasian Association of Philosophy and is a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities.

Craig Taylor is senior lecturer and head of the department of philosophy at the Flinders University of South Australia. He completed a doctorate at King’s College in the University of London under the supervision of Professor Raimond Gaita, before teaching philosophy at the University of Stirling in Scotland and Louisiana State University in the US. He joined the department at Flinders in 2005. He is the author of *Sympathy: A Philosophical Analysis* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) and *Moralism: A Study of a Vice* (Acumen, 2012) and numerous papers in ethics and moral psychology. He is now working on a book on the nature of ethical thought.

Joe Mintoff is a senior lecturer and head of the philosophy department at the University of Newcastle, Australia, having received his doctorate from the Australian National University. His research interests are in moral philosophy, specifically the theory of rational choice, moral epistemology, and ancient approaches to the question of how to live. His previous work has focused on the articulation and defense of a unified general solution to the well-known paradoxes of rationality. His more recent work is motivated by the Socratic
slogan that the unexamined life is not worth living, and examines the relationship between moral theorising and justified ethical belief. His articles have appeared in *American Philosophical Quarterly, Australasian Journal of Philosophy, Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, and *Ethics.*

**Andrew Gleeson** is a lecturer in philosophy at Flinders University. He has previously taught philosophy at the University of Adelaide and the Australian Catholic University. His doctorate, in the philosophy of mind, is from the Australian National University. He spent two years as a post-doctoral fellow at Rhodes University in South Africa, where he retains strong connections. He has published papers in ethics, philosophy of mind and philosophy of religion. His book *A Frightening Love: Recasting the Problem of Evil* was published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2012. His current project is an investigation of the relations between morality and religion,

**Discussion commentators for Day 2**

**Christine Swanton** is at the Philosophy Department in the University of Auckland, New Zealand. She is currently working on the virtue ethics of Hume and Nietzsche, a virtue ethical view of love, and a virtue ethical theory of role ethics. Her book *Virtue Ethics: A Pluralistic View* was published with Oxford University Press in 2003.

**Christopher Cordner** is associate professor in, and a former convenor of, the philosophy department at the University of Melbourne. He originally studied philosophy at Melbourne University and then at Oxford University where he completed
his doctorate. He has published many papers in ethics and is author of the book *Ethical Encounter: the Depth of Moral Meaning* (Palgrave Macmillan 2002). He has a strong interest in ancient Greek philosophy, especially Plato. He is working on another book in ethics, provisionally entitled *Simple Goodness*.

**Venue**

The workshop will be held in the Hetzel Lecture Theatre, Institute Building, on the north-east corner of North Terrace and Kintore Avenue, in the Adelaide CBD (Note: *not* on the Flinders campus at Bedford Park).

Everyone is welcome to attend both days of the workshop. But please advise us of your intention to attend, and whether for one day or both. There is no registration fee. There will be a workshop dinner on the Monday night. Again, please advise of your intention to attend.

Please direct all inquiries, and all expressions of intention to attend, to Dr Andrew Gleeson at Andrew.Gleeson@flinders.edu.au or on (08) 8201 7968. The number of attendees may have to be limited, so please make contact if you think you might attend.