

**Workshop on Constructing Social
Hierarchy**
(Supported by the Australian Research
Council)

Date: **Monday, February 20**, 9:45 am – 5:30 pm with drinks and informal dinner to follow
Location: The Research Lounge, Level 5, North Wing, Arts West, The University of Melbourne,

Schedule:

10:00 – 11:30 Veli Mitova, Johannesburg

Title: Decolonising experts

11:45 – 1:15 José Medina, Northwestern

Title: Imagining with Liberation Movements

Lunch break

2:15 – 3:45 Susan J. Brison, Dartmouth / Princeton

Title: Belonging to the Future

4:00 – 5:30 Victoria McGeer, ANU / Princeton

Title: Hostile Emotions and Moral Responsibility

Talks will be followed by drinks and an informal buffet dinner to which all are invited. Food will be vegan, with gluten-free options. For catering purposes, please reply to Matilda Millar-Carton tilymillar@hotmail.com before Thursday, February 16. Don't forget to indicate whether you'll stay for dinner. Early RSVP will help with our organizing.

Tuesday February 21

11:00 – 1:00 Masterclass (for postgraduate students only!) with José Medina

3:00 – 5:00 Workshop with Veli Mitova

Title: Decolonizing the philosophy curriculum: experiences from South Africa

Abstracts

Veli Mitova

What would happen to our notion of expertise if we took seriously decolonial theorists' insight that former colonial subjects continue to be epistemically marginalised and illegitimately stripped of epistemic authority? We should revise our accounts of expertise, I argue in this talk. The argument has three steps. First, I show that the experts of the epistemically marginalised (e.g. traditional healers) are indeed experts: they meet core conditions for responsibly placed trust inscientific experts. Second, I show that existing accounts of expertise cannot accommodate this claim. For instance, a traditional healer arguably doesn't meet the truth-condition on expertise commonly posited in the literature. Finally, I sketch a view of expertise—what I call communitarian functionalism—that accommodates the thought that the experts of the marginalised are indeed experts. Very roughly: a person counts as an expert in domain D in virtue of (i) her role in her epistemic *community*, (ii) the *values* of this community with respect to D, and (iii) whether she *responsibly* lives up to this role. If the argument works, it helps us make progress both in the epistemology of expertise and with the project of epistemic decolonisation.

José Medina

I will talk about the radical imagination of liberation movements and how it can contribute to undoing oppressive social hierarchies. I will talk to the special obligations we have to listen to liberation movements and to resist the communicative and epistemic obstacles they face. I will probably focus on abolitionism, including prison abolition and also gender abolition.

Susan J. Brison

This paper was sparked by my re-reading Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus* for the first time in nearly half a century. I'd never forgotten the first two sentences: "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy." But, this time, I was most struck by another sentence: "A man devoid of hope and conscious of being so has ceased to belong to the future."

Unlike Camus, who ponders how can life be worth living, given that it is absurd, I've never been bothered by the fact that life is absurd, if that means, simply, that it has no meaning but the meanings we give it ourselves. But I'm intensely interested in how those whose lives come to seem hopeless can find the wherewithal to keep on living.

Trauma survivors, for example, often feel as though their lives are over, as if they've somehow outlived themselves. However, although they may claim they're not the same persons they once were, they don't typically lose their memories of their pre-trauma pasts. What they frequently lose is a post-trauma past that makes sufficient sense cognitively and is bearable enough emotionally to provide a basis for projecting themselves into the future. The questions I'm thinking about are: How can constructing a narrative enable one to belong, once again, to the future? And how can one overcome the constraints social hierarchies place on narrative self-constitution?

I argue that being able to carry on when things seem hopeless requires an ability to construct new narratives reaching back into the past that can be continued going forward. It also

requires being in the right sorts of relations to others. For, as Cheshire Calhoun notes, “[o]ur having a reason to go on at all—our being ‘motivationally rooted’ in our lives in such a way that we are propelled toward the future—may depend on our being able to sustain deep attachments [among other things].”

This is why traditional thought experiments analyzed by personal identity theorists may make no sense to those who, like myself, hold a deeply relational view of the self. For what would there be to look forward to, after arriving, via, say, teletransportation, in a distant galaxy? Even if one’s intuition is that one would be numerically the same individual, why would one care about that person or look forward to life as that person if none of the people one cared about would also be there?

Victoria McGeer

The focus of this talk is moral anger – specifically, that form of anger often felt and expressed in response to perceived ill-treatment at the hands of others. Moral anger is thus a central feature of our blaming attitudes and practices -- attitudes and practices by which we characteristically hold others to account. But can such anger be justified? Is it an ineradicable and/or valuable feature of our moral psychology? Is it something that should be purged from our accountability practices, whether on moral or prudential grounds? In this talk, I argue the detractors’ attitude towards moral anger is practically and normatively misplaced. It is practically misplaced because anger at perceived injustice is a deep-rooted feature of human moral psychology; and it is normatively misplaced because its detractors significantly overplay its negative characteristics. Moral anger is a many-splendoured thing: it has both valuable and destructive dimensions. So, as philosophers and social theorists, the more pertinent question to ask is this: how can we take responsibility for capitalizing on the constructive face of moral anger?