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 groningen

centre for ppe

The 5th Groningen–Wharton PPE Workshop

September 7-8, 2026

University Library, Groningen (Tammeszaal, 4th floor library building, Broerstraat)

General information

Going into its fifth instalment, this annual workshop discusses work in progress in PPE (Philosophy, Politics, and Economics). Papers are circulated in advance and participants are expected to read them beforehand. Authors will give a short introduction, followed by a commentary and then a general discussion. The workshop is supported by the Zicklin Center for Business Ethics Research of The Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania and the Centre for Philosophy, Politics and Economics at the University of Groningen. It is organized by Brian Berkey (bberkey@wharton.upenn.edu) and Andreas Schmidt (a.t.schmidt@rug.nl) and will be held in person at the University of Groningen.

Registration

If you are interested in attending the workshop, please contact the local organizer Andreas Schmidt at a.t.schmidt@rug.nl. Places will be allocated on a first come, first serve basis.

Timetable

Monday, September 7:

9:30- 10:00	Welcome and round of introductions
10:00- 11:00	Julian Jonker (UPenn), 'Popular Data Sovereignty' Commentator: Boudewijn de Bruin
11:00- 11:30	Coffee break
11:30- 12:30	Fabian Corver (Groningen), 'The Superordinate Status of Corporate Purpose: A Moderate Realist Proposal' Commentator: Brian Berkey (UPenn)
12:30- 13:30	Lunch break (provided for all participants)
13:30- 14:30	Paul Forrester (UPenn), 'What is Free Labor? Economic Dependence without Domination' Commentator: Andreas Schmidt (Groningen)
14:30- 15:30	Eric Orts (UPenn), 'Business and the New Totalitarianism' Commentator: Lisa Herzog (Groningen)
15:30- 16:00	Coffee break
16:00- 17:00	Kritika Maheshwari (TU Delft) & Mike Gregory (Clemson/Mainz), 'Can Institutional Longtermism and Democracy be BFFs?' Commentator: Richard Endörfer (Utrecht)
17:30	Drinks (<u>Faculty of Philosophy</u> , Oude Boteringestaat 52; for all participants)
19:00	Dinner (<u>Semsom</u> , Oude Boteringestraat 14; speakers and commentators only)

Tuesday, September 8

9:30- 10:30	Rebecca Clark (Oxford), In Defence of Sin Taxes Commentator: Paul Pumsenberger (Groningen)
10:30-10:45	Coffee break
10:45- 11:45	Konrad Turnbull & Marijke C. Leliveld (Groningen), 'Structural Discrimination and The Pre-Procedural Chilling Effect: Procedural Fairness Expectations as a Potential Barrier to Filing Complaints' Commentator: Erica Yu
11:45- 12:45	Sophie Gibert (Penn), 'Why manipulation undermines consent' Commentator: Gil Hersch (Virginia Tech)
13:00	Lunch (Faculty of Philosophy, Oude Boteringestraat 52; speakers and commentators only)

Locations:



Titles and abstracts

Julian Jonker (Wharton), 'Popular Data Sovereignty'

Commentator: Boudewijn de Bruin

Abstract: In recent years a number of states have enacted laws and signed treaties that protect their data sovereignty, in the sense that these states assert jurisdiction and regulatory autonomy with respect to their citizens' data. But the evaluative status of data sovereignty is ambiguous, and its philosophical justification has not been sufficiently explored. Consider the very different deployment of notions of internet or digital sovereignty by China, India, and the EU: China has emphasized content restrictions and state control over the flow of information, India has required that data used by foreign companies be stored locally and subject to local regulation, while the EU has projected regulatory autonomy by requiring that any company handling an EU citizen's data observe EU data protection laws. I argue in favor of a principle of popular data sovereignty, drawing on and extending Leif Wenar's proposal of popular sovereignty over mineral resources.

Fabian Corver (Groningen), 'The Superordinate Status of Corporate Purpose: A Moderate Realist Proposal'

Commentator: Brian Berkey (Wharton)

Abstract: In management and organizational scholarship, there has been a resurgence of interest in the theoretical notion of corporate purpose. This paper examines whether contemporary work on this topic has, at a deeper philosophical level, shifted from its classical predecessors. To map the classical landscape, I distinguish between two positions: *Strong Purpose Realism*, exemplified in the work of Barnard and Selznick, which treats corporate purpose as an actualized, that is embodied, superordinate end sitting at the top of an organizational 'purpose hierarchy,' and *Purpose Skepticism*, exemplified in the work of March and Simon, which holds that this conception is both conceptually and empirically problematic, favoring instead a view that understands higher-level purposes as holistic configurations of constraints. Having surveyed these classical positions, I examine the contemporary situation and argue that current scholarship tends to commit to the language of corporate purpose as superordinate ends while stopping short of endorsing Strong Purpose Realism in its classical form. To account for this more nuanced position, I propose a Deweyan reinterpretation that provides the philosophical vocabulary to understand superordinate ends as 'real possibilities' involving imaginative projections, which I label *Moderate Purpose Realism*. The paper concludes by reflecting on how the different purpose conceptions, in both their classical and contemporary formulations, can in principle be philosophically reconciled through the resources of Moderate Purpose Realism, and what this implies for practices of purpose ascription in organizations, including the need to resist thinking exclusively in terms of a 'hierarchy of ends.'

Paul Forrester (Wharton), 'What is Free Labor? Economic Dependence without Domination'

Commentator: Andreas Schmidt (Groningen)

Abstract: Radical republicans argue that capitalism is unjust because workers are subject to *structural domination* by capitalists. They argue that against the backdrop of the unequal ownership of assets, workers are forced to sell their labor to some employer or other. They have no reasonable alternative to doing so, and depend on owners for their livelihoods. I present a reductio of this argument, showing that radical republicans are committed to the claim that a person is structurally dominated whenever she is forced to make some productive contribution or other. But this condition characterizes any just economic system, as people who are able to contribute must reciprocate for the benefits they receive. I instead suggest that economic non-domination should be understood in terms of *productive freedom*. People are economically dominated when they must

obtain permission to produce from others—when others can arbitrarily interfere in one’s productive activities. The injustice of the present capitalist order does not lie in the fact that people have to work. Rather, it lies in the ability of those who presently control the stock of productive assets to lock in their advantages by restricting the productive freedom of non-owners, often using the power of the state.

Eric Orts (Wharton), ‘Business and the New Totalitarianism’

Commentator: Lisa Herzog (Groningen)

Abstract: This research project advances the thesis that business plays a key role in the emergence of a new totalitarianism in the world. Relying in part on Hannah Arendt’s theory of totalitarianism, I sketch two general kinds: classical totalitarianism and business-and-state totalitarianism. Classical totalitarianism is described by Arendt as involving ideologies of race or class that are then brutally imposed in society through the capture of a nation-state. Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia are the primary historical cases. Maoist China also followed a Stalinist template. I argue that contemporary China and Russia have updated their ideologies, though in different ways, and continue to follow a pattern of classical totalitarianism in practice. What I call business-and-state totalitarianism also relies on ideology as a motivation for political rule, but business leaders are more prominent than in classical totalitarianism. They act as co-partners with politicians, as the recent partnership between Elon Musk and Donald Trump in the establishment of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) indicates as a possible precursor. I examine the Make America Great Again (MAGA) movement led by Trump as an example of a totalitarian ideology. It combines elements of an aggressive imperial nationalism with a racist and bigoted “us versus them” rhetoric that focuses especially on “alien” immigrants and refugees as a targeted “other.” With respect to both kinds of the totalitarianism, I make some recommendations for business to avoid complicity with and to act proactively to counter the rise of both classical and business-and-state totalitarianism.

Kritika Maheshwari (TU Delft) & Mike Gregory (Clemson/Mainz), ‘Can Institutional Longtermism and Democracy be BFFs?’

Commentator: Richard Endörfer

Abstract: Institutional longtermism evaluates institutions by their expected effects on the distant future. Recent defenses suggest that this standard is broadly compatible with democratic government (Schmidt & Barrett 2025). We challenge that assumption by focusing on back-loaded goals: goals whose value can be realized only if costly policies are sustained across successive electoral majorities. We distinguish neglect cases, in which citizens fail to attend adequately to future interests, from conflict cases, in which they understand those interests but reject the burdens required to advance them. In conflict cases, information dissemination, citizen deliberation, and representation for future generations may improve long-term decision-making, but cannot ensure that a long-term commitment survives informed democratic opposition. Increasing the probability that a back-loaded goal is eventually achieved instead requires reversal-resistant institutions that constrain later majorities’ capacity to repeal the policies on which its value depends. This creates a problem for institutional longtermism itself: the institutions best able to secure long-term value may do so only by weakening later citizens’ control over inherited commitment. We tentatively conclude that longtermists must accept this cost or narrow the scope of their institutional recommendations for preserving the long-term future of humanity.

Rebecca Clark (Oxford), In Defence of Sin Taxes

Commentator: Paul Pumsenberger (Groningen)

Abstract: It is widely believed that people should make a genuine social contribution as a matter of justice. Yet surprisingly little has been written on what jobs count towards the discharging of one's contributive duties, and nothing from a public reason perspective - perhaps because reasonable citizens will disagree sharply about the content of these duties. I argue that reasonable citizens can nonetheless agree that citizens owe each other a defeasible duty of justice to do their fair share towards contributing, even while disagreeing about what a valuable contribution looks like. Rather than resolve this disagreement directly, I pursue a negative strategy: I show that reasonable citizens with different conceptions of the good can nevertheless agree that certain jobs make a *disvaluable* contribution, because they undermine citizens' interests as free and equal persons who are committed to the ideal of society as a fair system of cooperation. Jobs in sin industries (such as tobacco and gambling) qualify, I argue, because their deliberately addictive nature undermines autonomy. This grounds two justice-based arguments for taxing employees in sin industries at a higher income tax rate: to disincentivise entry into these industries (Incentives Argument), or, if offsetting is possible, to ensure employees pay enough tax to offset the harm they cause (Recoupment Argument). Unlike taxes on the consumption of sin goods, this targeted income tax does not fall foul of standard objections of paternalism, ineffectiveness, and regressivity. The result is a novel defence of sin taxes grounded in citizens' duties of justice to contribute to society.

Konrad Turnbull & Marijke C. Leliveld (Groningen), 'Structural Discrimination and The Pre-Procedural Chilling Effect: Procedural Fairness Expectations as a Potential Barrier to Filing Complaints'

Commentator: Erica Yu

Abstract: Only 2-30% of victims of discrimination (i.e. vulnerable groups) file official complaints in their respective States, representing a structural and systemic problem. This article proposes that low perceptions of procedural fairness, through the fair process effect, may play an important role in deterring discrimination victims from making official complaints. This "chilling effect" is a clear access to justice issue; yet a gap remains in the literature regarding perceptions of procedural fairness towards international human rights bodies and courts (e.g. the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies (UNTBs)), the very bodies which are meant to safeguard individuals from such deterrence. Consequently, we used a 2 (group membership: vulnerable vs non-vulnerable) by 3 (body: State (UK), ECtHR, and UNTBs) mixed factorial design, which we conceptually replicated in a second study with a different vulnerable group (Study 1A: women, Study 1B: Black individuals). Our results demonstrate significant group differences in expected procedural fairness, where members of vulnerable groups reported significantly lower expectations procedural fairness significantly less fair than their non-vulnerable counterparts. Simultaneously, all participants perceived the procedures of international human rights bodies to be considerably fairer than that of UK authorities. These results build upon existing research on discrimination and procedural justice, whilst also Identifying one potential pre-procedural mechanism through which discrimination victims may be deterred from filing complaints.

Sophie Gibert (Penn), 'Why manipulation undermines consent'

Commentator: Gil Hersch (Virginia Tech)

Abstract: On a standard picture, coercion and manipulation invalidate consent by making it insufficiently voluntary. Of course, if voluntariness just is freedom from controlling influences like coercion and manipulation, this is no real explanation. A natural alternative is to say that voluntariness is an internal feature of agency—a relation between an agent's psychological states and her actions—and that coercion and manipulation invalidate consent by disrupting that relation.

This individualist story has been largely abandoned for coercion, since two incentives can have identical effects on someone's psychology while differing in their effect on consent. Consider a case from Wertheimer (1987): a private and public physician each offer to treat a patient for \$100—the going rate. Their proposals may affect the patient's psychology the same way. Yet only the public physician's proposal is coercive and consent-undermining, since only the public physician independently owes the patient free treatment.

In lieu of the individualist picture, scholars have offered accounts of voluntariness that focus on the normative relations between agents. For instance, Dougherty (2024) suggests that coercion undermines consent roughly because it involves influencing someone's deliberation by imposing penalties in a way the subject has a legitimate complaint against (44). The parallel move has not been made for manipulation. Instead, the individualist story persists, sustained by the familiar view that manipulation is wrong, when it is, because it bypasses or subverts the target's practical reasoning (Noggle 2025, Renzo 2025). On this picture, manipulation invalidates consent by disrupting an internal relation between agent and action.

This asymmetry imposes a cost. If voluntariness depends on the normative relations between individuals, but manipulation undermines consent by disrupting a relation internal to an individual, then manipulation doesn't invalidate consent by undermining voluntariness, as we once thought. Coercion and manipulation invalidate consent by fundamentally different mechanisms. Dougherty accepts this conclusion, suggesting that manipulation invalidates consent by undermining competence or decisional capacity rather than voluntariness (2024, 57); but this is a high price to pay.

I argue we should make the parallel move for manipulation. Like coercion, manipulation invalidates consent by undermining voluntariness, where voluntariness is a relational and normative notion. This move is available if we follow Gibert (2023) in abandoning the reasoning-based picture of why manipulation is wrong, opting for a view on which manipulation is wrong, when it is, because it influences someone's reasoning—though not by creating new reasons—in a way that infringes their rights.

The result is a unified principle. Coercion and manipulation invalidate consent by undermining voluntariness. But voluntariness is not defined as freedom from coercion and manipulation, nor is it an internal feature of agency. It is freedom from illegitimate control over one's deliberation.

This leaves us a deeper question—one Dougherty doesn't address. Why does having a legitimate complaint against the way one's deliberation is influenced make one's consent invalid? I suggest that an answer will require a relational account of consent itself, on which consent is in the first place a tool for negotiating the relations between different people.