The Epistemology of Conditioned Responsibility
Challenges and Alternatives
25 and 26 June 2026, UV

Program

Thursday, 25 June 2026

09:15 Welcome

Chair: Sergi Rosell

09:30–10:30 **Anne-Marie Sondengaard Christensen (University of Southern Denmark)**
Contextualising Individual Moral Responsibility: A Triadic Model.

10:30–11:30 **Saori Makino (Tohto University)**
Passivity as Answerability: Agency Beyond Control.

Coffee Break

Chair: Miguel Gramage

12:00–13:00 **Sebastian Sunday Grève (Peking University)**
AI and Global Ethics.

13:00–14:00 **Sergi Rosell and Chon Tejedor (Universitat de València)**
Conditioned Responsibility Revisited.

Lunch

Chair: Josep Corbí

16:00–17:00 **Gunnar Björnsson (Stockholm University)**
Complicity as accountability; accountability as one.

17:00–18:00 **Anirban Mukherjee (University of North Bengal)**
Epistemic Risk and Moral Agency: Reframing Conditioned Responsibility.

Friday, 26 June 2026

Chair: Miguel Gramage

09:30–10:30 **Josep Corbí and Sergi Rosell (Universitat de València)**
The Point of Hopeless Resistance.

10:30–11:30 **Michael Campbell (University of Kyoto)**
What is Epistemic Transformation?

Coffee Break

Final Session of the VLC Colloquium in Philosophy
Chair: Chon Tejedor

12:00–13:00 **Christopher Bennet (University of Sheffield)**
Evaluative attitudes towards things we cannot change.

13:00–14:00 **Maria Alvarez (King's College London)**
Abilities and Opportunities for Individual and Group.

Lunch

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Abstracts

Abilities and Opportunities for Individual and Group
Maria Alvarez (KCL)

Responsibility for one's behaviour and its consequences is in part determined by one's 'agential possibilities': the range of actions available to one at relevant times, as well as by the epistemic features of the situation. Agential possibilities, in turn, depend in one's individual abilities and the opportunities open to one. When the behaviour at issue is a form of group or joint action, the natural assumption is that these are also determined by 'group' or 'joint' abilities, and relevant opportunities. In this paper I challenge that assumption, suggesting a different way to understand the relation between agential possibilities, abilities, and individual and group action.

Evaluative attitudes towards things we cannot change
Christopher Bennett (Sheffield)

Sometimes we find ourselves in situations that have negative evaluative import for us but which we cannot change. The reasons why these situations cannot be changed vary: e.g. they may be temporal, natural, social or individual. Sometimes those reasons are normative, as in cases of practical conflict that have what Bernard Williams called 'moral remainder.' Furthermore, we can distinguish evaluative attitudes towards: a) immutable conditions; and b) conditions that could in principle be changed but where, perhaps because of challenges of social coordination or overwhelming trade-offs, such change is unlikely. We can also distinguish between cases in which our agency is or is not implicated in some way in the creation of the situation; and, where it is implicated, we can distinguish the specific forms that that implication takes. This talk asks whether we can say anything in very general terms about evaluative attitudes towards such situations, in particular, attitudes such as remorse, grief, disappointment, regret, or what Williams calls agent-regret. One question is about the value of such attitudes. Is Williams correct to say, in his discussion of agent-regret, that a response to such situations can be inadequate unless it involves one of these attitudes? A second question follows from any positive answer to this first question. If *some* evaluative attitude is important, it does not follow that just *any* such attitude is. We need some basis for discrimination. Is it possible to say anything in very general terms about the comparative evaluation of these evaluative attitudes: what is it that makes them fitting to the situation; and which attitude might be fitting to a situation with a given range of salient features? I suggest that we can make progress with these questions by relating them to some of my recent work on expressive action and expressive reasons (Bennett 2016, 2022, 2026 in press).

Complicity as accountability; accountability as one
Gunnar Björnsson (Stockholm)

Sometimes agents seem accountable for harms brought about by others solely in virtue of their intentional participation in a harmful collective enterprise, despite not having themselves causally contributed to these harms. At other times, as in cases of individual or collective omissions to prevent harm, agents seem accountable for harms in virtue of being part of why they materialized,

and not in virtue of any intentional involvement in what brought them about. Thus, on the face of it, there are two distinct bases for accountability. This paper argues that these bases have an underlying unity. The argument proceeds by supporting three claims. First, valuable and disvaluable outcomes provide agents with contributory reasons for or against actions that contribute to what brings these outcomes about, regardless of any difference made to them. Second, when an agent fails to act on such reasons and the outcome unfolds accordingly, the outcome is constitutive of an imbalance in how she has distributed her agency. Third, accountability responses are fitting insofar as they correct for such imbalances. Cases of accountability through participation and causal involvement both fit this model: contrary to appearances, accountability is one.

What is Epistemic Transformation?
Michael Campbell (Kyoto)

Sometimes we undergo step-changes in our status as knowers. In these moments, our cognitive capabilities undergo a radical reorientation. How should this phenomenon be understood? Current work on epistemic transformation typically begins from LA Paul's conceptualisation of the phenomenon, according to which the driver of epistemic transformation is direct acquaintance with a novel experiential kind. (Paul, *Transformative Experience*, OUP, 2014) In this paper I criticise Paul's account and offer an alternative. I argue that acquaintance relations are neither necessary nor sufficient for an individual's being epistemically transformed. Instead, we should understand epistemic transformation in terms of the subject's induction into a new practical-epistemic field.

The Point of Hopeless Resistance
Josep Corbí and Sergi Rosell (Valencia)

A women or a child being raped resists even though their resistance has no positive effect—given the attacker's overwhelming strength—and will even be counterproductive. The victim is convinced they must resist the attack or the aggression, despite the fact that their resistance seems ineffective, and even counterproductive. The victim's resistance may not actually be futile or counterproductive due to good luck. Still, we may call it a case of *hopeless*—not necessarily futile—*resistance* insofar as (a) the victim is convinced that nothing they can do will stop or avert the harm, but (b) they do not exclude that, by a stroke of luck, their resistance might turn out to have a positive effect—although it could turn out the other way too. The question arises as to whether such resistance is morally permissible when involving violence, given that the victim's actions will most likely cause useless harm to others.

At first sight, the principles of defensive ethics favor a negative verdict, since the permissibility of a harmful response rests on two conditions, namely: the *effectiveness* of one's action to avert—or reduce—the ongoing harm and the *indispensability* of such action to this purpose. Hopeless resistance does not meet, however, the effectiveness condition and, therefore, the indispensability condition does not apply. Some have argued however that, though hopeless actions may not be effective regarding a primary harm, there may be some other moral goods that such actions might effectively protect or defend—let us call it *the Two-Tier View*. Honour (Statman 2008) or dignity (Statman 2008, McMahan 2016, 2017) have been proposed as such moral goods, but each such proposal carries its own shortcomings.

In view of these difficulties, Edmund Flanigan (2023, forthcoming) proposes an alternative approach for the permissibility of such actions based on the idea that their point is not so much defense as expression and, more specifically, protest—*the Protest View*. Our analysis of the point of hopeless resistance will heavily rely on the idea of expression, as Flanigan's own approach does. We will provide, however, an analysis of the nature and content of this expression that departs from his in some crucial respect; among others, we will conclude that expression is not at odds with defense.

Passivity as Answerability: Agency Beyond Control
Saori Makino (Chiba, Japan)

This paper reconsiders responsibility by challenging its dominant association with agency, control, and voluntary choice. In many ethical and political contexts, responsibility is understood as something a subject actively takes on. Yet this model struggles to account for situations in which one finds oneself already called upon to respond: care, dependency, vulnerability, or bodily exposure. I argue that such passivity should not be treated as a deficiency of responsibility, but as one of its conditions.

To develop this claim, I bring Stanley Cavell and Ludwig Wittgenstein into conversation, while taking Naomi Scheman's feminist critique as a guiding point of departure. From Cavell, I draw the idea that responsibility can be understood less as a matter of sovereign self-possession than as responsiveness grounded in acknowledgment. From Wittgenstein, I emphasize that our responsiveness does not arise from an isolated inner decision, but from forms of life in which criteria, expectations, and trust are already at work. On this view, responsibility emerges not simply when I "take responsibility," but also when I find myself responsible.

This redescription has an important feminist implication. Philosophical models of responsible subjectivity have often marginalized passivity by associating it with dependence, embodiment, or femininity. Against this tendency, I suggest that passivity is not external to responsibility but internal to its very possibility. Reframing responsibility in terms of responsiveness allows us to describe care, dependency, and embodied exposure not as failures of agency, but as sites where responsibility is first formed.

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Epistemic Risk and Moral Agency: Reframing Conditioned Responsibility
Anirban Mukherjee (University of North Bengal)

In a world where no single action seems to make a difference, how can responsibility remain meaningful and action-guiding? Accounts of conditioned responsibility aim to explain how individuals may be responsible in agency-stultifying situations, where their actions neither intend nor significantly cause cumulative harm, yet remain implicated through their relation to the conditions that sustain it. This framework faces a fundamental difficulty that remains insufficiently addressed: the problem of normative overreach. If responsibility is grounded in participation in, or benefit from, harmful conditions, then in highly interconnected social worlds it appears to extend across nearly all agents. Such diffusion threatens not only conceptual clarity but also practical traction, reinstating the very epistemic and motivational paralysis the framework seeks to overcome. Hence, there is the fear of epistemic risk leading to moral risk.

This paper argues that the source of this difficulty lies in the continued, if implicit, reliance on a harm-based model of responsibility in contexts where harm is neither individually attributable nor epistemically accessible. I explore the alternative proposal that responsibility in such contexts

is better understood in terms of risk participation: agents are implicated not in harm itself, but in sustaining practices that structure the probability of harm under conditions of uncertainty, including the possibility of threshold effects where any individual may become causally decisive.

It is at this juncture that a Kantian insight becomes indispensable. Where the consequences of action are epistemically inaccessible, the moral evaluation of action cannot be grounded in outcomes. Instead, it must be located in the will that orients itself against unjust conditions. To act under such conditions is not to calculate impact, but to refuse participation in, or to resist, structures that one has reason to regard as harmful. The thought that "every move counts," even though one cannot know how it counts, is not a consequentialist claim about expected outcomes, but a recognition of the limits of outcome-based reasoning. It is precisely because outcomes cannot be known that intention must bear the normative weight.

However, a purely Kantian account risks abstraction if it does not address the motivational and social conditions under which such action is sustained. In agency-stultifying situations, agents often lack not only knowledge of impact but also assurance of collective uptake. Action must therefore be possible in the absence of coordination, recognition, or reciprocity. This is where resources from Indian thought become philosophically significant.

To address this gap, the paper turns to resources from Indian philosophy. Gandhi's conception of ethical action as disciplined practice (*satyagraha*) reconceives responsibility as action sustained without assurance of efficacy, while Tagore's "*Ekla Chalo Re*" articulates the condition of acting without recognition or collective uptake. Together, they illuminate a dimension largely absent in existing accounts: responsibility as solitary, practice-based responsiveness under epistemic uncertainty. The domino effect—the cascading transformation of collective conditions—becomes possible only through such prior, isolated acts of responsibility.

Contextualising Individual Moral Responsibility: A Triadic Model

Anne-Marie Søndergaard Christensen (University of Southern Denmark)

In this talk, I argue that we need to return to everyday ethics to develop a contextualised and comprehensive philosophical understanding of individual moral responsibility. I will focus on the complex uses of this concept in public debates on pressing social issues, and, more specifically, I will explore how individual responsibility is used in discussions on countering climate change in news media. Based on this, I argue for a formal and triadic model of the basic structure of individual moral responsibility (inspired by Wittgenstein's idea of a surveyable representation). The model presents the concept as having three main elements: the responsible moral subject, the external object of responsibility and the relevant moral community, as well as the relations between them. I argue that the model highlights the relational and dynamic character of responsibility and how the concept thus has built-in possibilities for tension and conflict. I further argue that the model may serve as an organising tool for discussions of philosophical theories of responsibility by making explicit the relations between (and limitations of) different theories and theoretical traditions and by enabling interaction between them.

AI and Global Ethics

Sebastian Sunday Grève (Peking University)

The paper presents an analysis of individual and collective responsibility in AI, before arguing mainly three interrelated points. First, we as a society at this moment in history ought to expend considerable resources on something like the cultivation of humanity, including a shared positive vision for the future. Second, the feeling of authenticity or inauthenticity as the case may be, of being in or out of control of our own destiny, etc., is an effective proxy for the problem that we are facing both individually and collectively. Third, what is therefore required from the point of view of AI ethics and governance is a kind of foundational exchange concerning what might be called global ethics, comparative ethics, or simply the common good.