

Arizona Workshop on Freedom & Responsibility
Department of Philosophy &
Center for the Philosophy of Freedom*
University of Arizona
November 7-8, 2025

Friday 7 November 2025

3:00 -5:00 Dana Nelkin
Department of Philosophy, University of California, San Diego
“Normative Powers and Responsibility Practices”

Saturday 8 November 2025

9:00-10:30 Derk Pereboom
Department of Philosophy, Cornell University
"The Ability to Do Otherwise and the Accessibility of Alternatives"

10:45-12:15 Jason Turner
Department of Philosophy, University of Arizona
“Contextualism about Abilities”

12:15-1:45 Lunch

1:45-3:15 Mark Balaguer
Department of Philosophy, California State University, Los Angeles
“A New Response to the Luck Objection”

3:30-5:00 Carolina Sartorio
Department of Philosophy, Rutgers University
“Basic and non-basic responsibility: Against unification”

All talks will be held in the Maloney Seminar Room, Social Science Building 224 on the University of Arizona Campus. There will be no remote option for the Saturday talks.

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Please direct questions to Michael McKenna at msmckenna63@gmail.com.

Abstracts

“A New Response to the Luck Objection”

Mark Balaguer, California State University, Los Angeles

The luck objection to libertarianism about free will states, somewhat roughly, that if a decision is undetermined in the way that's required for libertarian free will, then it occurs randomly and, hence, isn't free in any robust sense. This paper argues for the contrary claim that if decisions are undetermined in the relevant way, then they satisfy all of the other requirements for libertarian free will. The paper provides a new argument for this claim that doesn't require libertarians to make any additional assumptions.

“Normative Powers and Responsibility Practices”

Dana Nelkin, University of California, San Diego

There has been much recent discussion of whether and, if so when, people possess standing to respond to wrongdoing in various ways, notably by blaming and forgiving. Theorists disagree about a number of claims, including how best to understand the nature of standing, under what conditions it is undermined, whether it applies to the mere possession of certain attitudes, and more. In this paper, I identify a number of extant arguments and conclusions that I think are correct, but have not been put together in a single package. When they are, I believe they provide mutual support and illumination. In particular, I endorse a picture that incorporates a conception of standing as a normative power modeled after the notion of standing in the law, supports the existence of a central kind of forgiveness as a kind of debt release, offers a plausible account of the relationship between blaming and holding accountable, explains why blame seems to come in degrees where forgiveness of an important sort does not, and explains an asymmetry in debates about hypocrisy and “meddling”. I conclude by exploring implications for debates about self-blame and the standing of the state.

“The Ability to Do Otherwise and the Accessibility of Alternatives”

Derk Pereboom, Cornell University

Frankfurt (1969) examples contest an alternative possibilities requirement for moral responsibility. But as I will argue, Frankfurt examples do not rule either general or, as Nelkin argues (2011), certain special abilities to do otherwise as such requirements. However, it remains open that they successfully contest the notion of an alternative possibility at stake in the free will debate. Randolph Clarke suggests that Frankfurt examples instead contest the requirement that it be up to the agent to exercise that ability, or that it be the agent's choice to exercise that ability (Clarke 2009). I propose, further, that the conceptually distinct notion of an agent's having access to the alternative specified in such abilities to do otherwise is successfully targeted, and that this notion of access also illuminates other controversies in the free will debate.

“Basic and non-basic responsibility: Against unification”

Carolina Sartorio, Rutgers University

Unlike basic responsibility, non-basic responsibility is a kind of responsibility that is inherited (from our responsibility for something else). The question I'm interested in examining in this paper is this: Should we still expect these two forms of responsibility to be unified in some significant way? Is unification an advantage of a theory of responsibility? Some (notably, van Inwagen, Fischer and Ravizza, and Capes) have thought so. I argue against unification. I then draw consequences for some debates about the ability to do otherwise.

“Contextualism about Abilities”

Jason Turner, University of Arizona

In *Freedom & Responsibility in Context*, Ann Whittle argues for a contextualism about abilities according to which, essentially, X is able to A iff X has both the "all-in" ability to A and the opportunity to try to A, where contextual variation shifts what counts as an opportunity to try to A. Combined with an alternative-abilities-based account of freedom and moral responsibility, this delivers a framework where arguments for incompatibilism generally fail, but succeed in appropriately high-standards contexts. In this talk I raise several issues about (i) the linguistic evidence for contextual variation of this sort; (ii) the relevance of claims such as "X is able to A" to core philosophical claims about an agents' abilities; and (iii) the downstream philosophical consequences if the thesis is true.