

Japanese Society for British Philosophy / Australia–Japan Special Conference
Themes from Early Modern British Philosophy

Date: 31 July–1 August 2026

Venue: Australian Catholic University, Western Civilisation Program
Level 11, 33 Berry Street, North Sydney, 2060

ABSTRACTS

DAY 1 31 July 2026

9:45–10:45 Lecture Room 05

“The Nature of Eels in Vinegar”: representations of natural philosophy in Restoration drama

Barnaby Ralph (The University of Tokyo)

As natural philosophy grew in stature and importance in seventeenth-century Restoration England, so too did the variety of its representations in popular culture. This paper considers two such examples in the plays *The Virtuoso* (1676) by Thomas Shadwell, and *The Emperor of the Moon* (1687) by Aphra Behn. The first presents Sir Nicholas Gimcrack as an amateur natural scientist who constantly engages in seemingly foolish experiments, such as training himself to swim froglike on a table, or collecting jars of air from across the country. The second offers Doctor Baliardo, a character derived in part from Shadwell’s Gimcrack, who is convinced that the moon is inhabited and fancies himself able to spy on its affairs through his telescope.

Whilst both plays are commonly read, at least in part, as satiric attacks on the Royal Society, they can equally be understood as supporting the idea of the professional scientist over the amateur. The experiments they present are founded in reality, but are exaggerated and taken out of context. In the case of *The Virtuoso*, Robert Hooke famously attended the play and recognised himself as the object of ridicule. However, it is worth considering whether he and his experiments themselves were being mocked, or the public understanding of them and their adoption by the “virtuoso” class of wealthy scientific dilettante. The same argument can be made even more clearly in the case of *The Emperor of the Moon*, as the science of optics is not itself the object of mockery; rather, the play makes fun of the foolish use to which it is put by a deluded noble.

In addition, both plays refer to the natural sciences, but they are essentially used as a backdrop against which the real material – romantic farce – is to be placed in order to give it extra interest and contemporary relevance for the audiences of the day. This paper will finally argue that there exists a parallel with modern criticism of the natural sciences and philosophy, where the specific context of the experiments or ideas denigrated is much less important than the critic making an over-reaching, if somewhat banal, ideological point in an ongoing attack on intellectualism itself.

10:45–11:45 Lecture Room 05

Locke's *Essay* as logic textbook of experimental philosophy

Shigeyuki Aoki (Chuo University)

It is the standard historiography of the history of the early modern philosophy that Locke is the forerunner of “British empiricism,” consisting of the trio of “Locke, Berkeley, and Hume.” The standard historiography divides the philosophers in the 17th-18th century into two camps, “the continental rationalists” and “the British empiricists,” and this division was overcome by Kant's synthesis – so the story continues. Richard Rorty (1979) characterised the modern philosophy by “epistemological turn” with each role played by Descartes, Locke and Kant, and this “epistemological turn” view takes the modern epistemology as culminating in Kant's tribunal model.

In this model, Locke is in a twofold predicament. On one hand, Locke is committed to “super-science” epistemological project, according to which philosophy should act as the “court” of all the other cultures. On the other, Locke is a premature or second-rate philosopher as his philosophy just provides “a certain physiology of human understanding (Kant)” and conflates causes with reasons (Rorty).

We should naturally reject both images, and I will touch on the first in this presentation. My understanding of Locke's *Essay* gets much impetus from reading Locke's correspondence with William Molyneux (1656-1698), who Locke most trusted in preparing for the second edition of his *Essay*. The reading shows us that Locke's *Essay* was read by the students at Trinity College Dublin as a textbook of “Logick,” not as forming the epistemological canon which eventually leads up to Kant's tribunal model. Molyneux says, “*Essay* concerning Humane Understanding, has rectified more received Mistakes, and delivered more profound Truths, established on Experience and Observation, for the Direction of Man's mind in the Production of Knowledge, (which I think may be properly term'd Logick).”

Thus, by rejecting the backward reading – reading the subsequent modern epistemological canon back into Locke – and by comparing the contemporary experimental works with Locke's *Essay*, we will hope to have a better understanding of Locke's philosophy, while doing justice to the context in which the *Essay* was introduced, used, and proliferated.

12:00–13:30 Lecture Room 05

Locke and the ethics of belief: In view of the historic debate between Clifford and James (Keynote Address)

Masaki Ichinose (PhD, Emeritus Professor of the University of Tokyo, Honorary Fellow of the University of Oxford, Professor of Musashino University)

What is the main and the most influential part in Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding*? It seems to me that, as far as we consider that his arguments are understood as the starting point of philosophical epistemology, the Book 4 of his *Essay* must be regarded as its core part, where the

epistemological issues like “knowledge,” “truth,” and “probability” (“belief” in a current terminology) are directly focused upon. Then, what is the crucial view Locke offers there? As far as I understand, that is, in short, “we should be held responsible for any mistakes about our knowledge or belief if we did not correctly carry out the function of our reason that God gave us” (see 4.17.24).

Obviously, that view of Locke sounds to bear a striking resemblance to the well-known ethical theory that is called “The Ethics of Belief” W. K. Clifford developed in the 19th century. Of course, Clifford’s Ethics of Belief is known as well to be fiercely criticized by William James’s “The Will to Believe.” It seems to me that at first glance Locke’s epistemology sounds to be opposed to James’s “The Will to Believe,” but we must be careful to recognize such the possibility that there would be something harmonizing with James’s view in Locke’s argument.

My aim of this presentation is, hopefully, to clarify how Locke’s epistemology could be elucidated in view of the historic debate between Clifford and James, and to bring out the insightful implications in Locke’s argument.

14:30–15:30 Lecture Room 05

Ideas, relations, and signs: the development of Berkeley’s view of scientific knowledge

Yasuaki Nakano (Keio University)

In the *Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710), Berkeley divides objects of knowledge in two heads: ideas and spirits. But in the second edition of the *Principles*, published twenty-four years later, Berkeley introduced the third kind of objects: relations. Furthermore, he applied a technical term to this new branch of knowledge, ‘notion’, distinguishing it from ideas. What is it that urged Berkeley to revise his system of knowledge in the later edition? And what significant implication does this revision have for his overall theory of knowledge? I argue that the key to understanding the ‘notion of relations’ lies in Berkeley’s engagement with Newton’s mechanics, showing how the new category of relations came out of the development of his view of scientific knowledge from the *Principles* to *De Motu* (1721) and *Alciphron* (1732). While he initially equated Newton’s gravitational law with observable regularities, Berkeley in *De Motu* came to see it as identifying the most general rules transcending mere phenomena. In *Alciphron*, he substantiates this revision by his ‘doctrine of signs’ according to which the sciences aiming at universality involves an inventive use of symbols. Scientific knowledge is knowledge of the universal laws, i.e. of the universal relations, that we attain to by the use of symbols that express them. I will suggest that this development ultimately led Berkeley, in *Siris* (1744), to modify his theory of knowledge by drawing a distinction between ‘understanding’ and ‘sense’, attributing the knowing power only to the former.

15:45–17:15 Lecture Room 05

Mary Wollstonecraft on class and friendship (Keynote Address)

Eileen Hunt (University of Notre Dame)

I will uncover the Platonic, Augustinian, and Miltonic sources for the young Wollstonecraft's theory of true or higher friendship and how she eventually developed, in the first book-length response to Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France—A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790)—a political-economic theory of how hierarchical class systems negatively affect the possibility of its realization.

DAY 2 1 August 2026

9:30–10:30 Lecture Room 05

George Berkeley's law of nature within his philosophical milieu

Cao Viet Mai (Australian Catholic University)

The concept of the law of nature had been a theological metaphor throughout the medieval period, recognising God as the Creator and Governor of the world. In the early modern period, driven by the desire to systematically describe natural phenomena, René Descartes sought to apply this concept to natural philosophy. Descartes sought to construct an ontology in which God immediately governs the world by ruling over material substance through motion. Then, following Descartes' notion of the law of nature, Robert Boyle affirmed that God had to govern material substance, since matter lacks the intellectual capacity to follow laws. Additionally, although John Locke generally appreciated Boyle's position that God governs the world through matter and his experimental approach, he dissented from Boyle and Descartes by rejecting innate ideas. This rejection means that, according to Locke, people know the law of nature not because God implants an innate idea within them, but through a process of abstraction as they interact with the natural world. Furthermore, Locke emphasises the moral aspect of the law of nature, promoting its practical application for human flourishing. Although Malebranche was a Cartesian and interested in natural philosophy, he sought greater consistency with the claim that God immediately governs the world. Instead of assigning power and significance to matter, Malebranche opted for God's direct influence on the human mind through his theory of vision in God.

Due to his education at Trinity College Dublin and his involvement with the Dublin Philosophical Society, George Berkeley had to wrestle with the ideas of these philosophers within his philosophical milieu. This paper will argue that Berkeley sought to be more consistent than these philosophers in promoting God's immediate governance in his understanding of the law of nature by rejecting material substance and abstraction. Furthermore, it will argue that Berkeley seems to apply Locke's practical use of the law of nature and Malebranche's metaphysical humility to his understanding, arguing that the law of nature does not tell people what nature is like, but is there to help people flourish.

10:30–12:00 Lecture Room 05

Locke on tyranny and resistance (Keynote Address)

Kiyoshi Shimokawa (Emeritus Professor, Gakushuin University)

This paper examines neglected aspects of John Locke's theory of tyranny and resistance in order to provide a more coherent interpretation of that theory. First, it argues that Locke's right of resistance should be understood as a right of war derived from Hugo Grotius's concept of *jus belli*. Locke sees the right of war as the right to kill an aggressor, which rests on the natural law requirement that while all human beings are to be preserved, innocent lives should be preferred where all cannot be preserved. This interpretation of the right of resistance explains Locke's repeated reliance on the idea of a state of war when discussing resistance, clarifies why he does not address resistance in his theory of toleration, and rejects the view that such language is merely rhetorical. Second, the paper reassesses Locke's use of trust. Rather than directly grounding the right to resist tyranny, trust explains how the people acquire the right to reconstitute political authority by establishing a new legislative body when government collapses. This functions as an institutional safeguard against tyranny and supports a broader right to prevent tyranny without necessarily requiring force. Finally, the paper reconsiders Locke's notion of 'an appeal to heaven'. When there is no common judge to settle disputes, and when a king rejects the people's judgment, they may resort to war to restore their rights. Locke's theory thus combines (1) the right of war, (2) the institutional safeguard to prevent tyranny, and (3) the last resort to arms to seek justice.

12:15–13:15 Lecture Room 05

From Locke's reasonable Christianity to Hume's skeptical naturalism

Naoki Yajima (International Christian University)

Locke and Hume offer sharply contrasting ways of understanding religious belief within Enlightenment philosophy. Locke seeks to preserve Christian faith by distinguishing it from demonstrative knowledge while still placing it under the supervision of reason. For him, faith does not amount to demonstrative knowledge, but it remains answerable to reason: it may go "above reason," but it must never go "against reason." Locke treats God's existence as demonstrable, while taking the existence of external objects to be sufficiently assured through sensation and through the reliability of the faculties God has given us. Hume, on the other hand, denies that either religious belief or belief in external objects can be rationally demonstrated. Yet he does not dismiss religion, but argues that belief arises from custom, imagination, association, and repeated experience. On this interpretation, belief in God may be understood analogously to belief in the self, morality, politics, and the external world: it is a natural product of human psychology rather than a conclusion of reason. Thus, while Locke defends a "reasonable Christianity," I argue that Hume reframes religious belief naturalistically, as a kind of natural belief. I therefore describe Hume as a skeptical naturalist about religion: he explains religious belief as a natural phenomenon of human life, while denying that it can be rationally demonstrated or dogmatically secured.

14:15–15:15 Lecture Room 05

Traces of the Miltonian sublime in the music of George Frederic Handel

Ayako Otomo (Surugadai University)

The broad dissemination of the aesthetic concept of the sublime in eighteenth-century England and its adoption in popular philosophical discourse was underpinned by the appearance of the French translation of the pseudo-Longinus's *On the Sublime* by Nicolas Boileau in 1674. However, evidence suggests that John Milton knew of the text prior to this translation and its subsequent promulgation through the work of John Hall in 1652, as well as possibly the well-known neo-Latin translation of Gabrielis de Petra from 1612. In the subsequent critical writing of the long eighteenth century, Milton was frequently mentioned as one of the leading poets to engage with sublime elements, providing an example for later writers. Joseph Addison's 1712 essay "The Pleasures of the Imagination" is one such example. Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that the early modern English version of the philosophical concept of the sublime tends to be an amalgam of both Milton's incorporation of it in works such as *Paradise Lost* and the importation and modification of the version from France. This is culturally evident in painting, in poetry, and particularly in music, as in the works of George Frederic Handel, the leading operatic composer for the London stage in the eighteenth century.

This paper first explores the early conceptualising of the sublime in England during the seventeenth century, drawing on a practical example by Milton in his 1671 tragic drama *Samson Agonistes*, and then turns to the post-Boileau development of a more fully-realised Addisonian aesthetic sublime in the 1743 oratorio *Samson* by Handel, with its libretto based on Milton's earlier work. The discussion will also consider the general principle of how a musical text can incorporate and represent elements of the sublime, and particularly do so for the versions that entered aesthetic and philosophical discourse in Britain before the forms developed by Burke and Kant became dominant in the latter part of the eighteenth century.

15:30–17:00 Lecture Room 05

"Beyond the narrow circle": Hume on the uses and misuses of analogy (Keynote Address)

Philippe Hamou (Sorbonne University)

The paper examines David Hume's treatment of analogical reasoning and its role in philosophical and scientific inquiry. Hume repeatedly acknowledges analogy as the only possible method for reasoning about objects that lie "beyond the narrow circle" of direct experience—such as the soul, the origins of the world, the nature of God, but also the "secret springs and principles" of nature. Yet he also treats analogical reasoning as epistemically fragile, since it relies on partial resemblance and is therefore prone to error.

This tension is illustrated in the discussion of the mortality/immortality of the soul. Hume's

argument in his posthumous essay on the subject, which relies on an analogy between body and mind, contrasts sharply with religious arguments such as those found in George Berkeley or Joseph Butler, where analogy from the order of nature supports belief in immortality. Both sides appeal to the same methodological principle—the “analogy of nature”—yet reach opposite conclusions.

To clarify his position, the paper situates Hume’s account of analogy as a form of “irregular” induction within the broader tradition of experimental philosophy, drawing on Francis Bacon, John Locke, and Isaac Newton, and then examines its uses and misuses in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. Through the debate between Cleanthes and Philo, Hume explores both the legitimacy and the limits of analogical reasoning, particularly in the design argument.

Hume does not reject analogy but seeks to regulate its use. Legitimate analogical reasoning must respect principles of proportion and parsimony: causes should be inferred only insofar as they are proportionate to the observed effects and no more numerous than necessary to explain them. Abuse arises when analogical reasoning is combined with uncontrolled ampliative moves, which project attributes derived from human experience onto remote objects and thus encourage anthropomorphic speculation.

Yet the paper also shows that analogy is not merely a risk. The science of human nature itself depends on analogical reasoning, since the “inner springs” governing mental operations—association, custom, etc.—are not directly observable but must be inferred from patterns of resemblance between different mental phenomena. In this respect, philosophical inquiry into the mind, like natural philosophy, proceeds by extending observed relations to unseen mechanisms. The challenge is therefore not to eliminate analogy but to discipline it: when properly regulated, it allows philosophy to venture beyond the narrow circle of immediate experience while remaining within the bounds of empirical inquiry.