

Arizona Workshop on Freedom & Responsibility
Department of Philosophy &
Center for the Philosophy of Freedom*
University of Arizona
November 6-7, 2026

Friday 6 November 2026

3:00 -5:00 Mikayla Kelley, Neubauer Family Assistant Professor
Department of Philosophy, University of Chicago
"Vital Action"

Saturday 7 November 2026

9:00-10:30 Andrew Law, Assistant Professor
Department of Philosophy, Pomona College
"Incompatibilism in Light of Relativity"

10:45-12:15 Chris Cho, PhD Candidate
Department of Philosophy, Syracuse University
"Modalism, Causalism, and Explanationism"

12:15-1:45 Lunch

1:45-3:15 Philip Swensen, Associate Professor
Department of Philosophy, College of William and Mary
"Two Routes to the Principle of Alternative Possibilities"

3:30-5:30 Randolph Clarke, Professor and Chair
Department of Philosophy, Florida State University
"Blame and Anger, More or Less"

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

“Vital Action”

Mikayla Kelley, University of Chicago

Abstract: The functioning of one's body is among our most important and universal practical ends. We are constantly exerting control over our own biological processes. Consider taking a sip of water to quench your thirst, putting on a jacket to warm yourself, or taking a pill to relieve a headache. Yet according to the orthodoxy, biological processes are not actions. They are not manifestations of minded agency. They merely happen to us. Thus, they are not seen as a topic for philosophers of action. In this talk, I argue that biological processes constitute a distinctive category of intentional action--what I call *vital action*. In doing so, I correct a number of myths about the nature of human agency. I also examine what is especially interesting, from a practical perspective, about the specific vital actions of digestion, defecation, and gestation.

“Incompatibilism in Light of Relativity”

Andrew Law, Pomona College

Abstract: Recently, several authors have claimed that the shift from Newtonian to relativistic physics undermines some of the central arguments for incompatibilism. (Deery & Nahmias 2023; Ismael 2023.) I argue that these authors overstate their cases. Nonetheless, the shift to relativity should be of interest to incompatibilists for other reasons. First, *contra* van Inwagen, the incompatibilist must "step foot into the morass" that is causation. Second, reflection on relativistic laws strongly suggests that some (non-Humean) deterministic laws are less threatening to free will than others. Thus, incompatibilists ought to restrict their thesis to certain *kinds* of (physical) determinisms. Both upshots, I claim, make incompatibilism more vulnerable in various ways.

“Modalism, Causalism, and Explanationism”

Chris Cho, Syracuse University

Abstract: Many find it plausible that S being free and responsible for some action requires S having been sensitive or responsive to a suitable range of reasons. But what is the best way to understand this sensitivity? While it has been standard to be modalists about this, where modalists spell out an agent's reasons-sensitivity by appealing to certain modal properties she has, two alternative accounts have recently emerged: Sartorio's causalism and Heering's explanationism. While both may point to genuine pressures on modalism as traditionally conceived, I argue that they ultimately call for its refinement rather than abandonment.

“Two Routes to the Principle of Alternative Possibilities”

Philip Swensen, College of William and Mary

Abstract: The Principle of Alternative Possibilities (PAP) holds that an agent is morally responsible only if she could have done otherwise. I will present two different strategies for motivating and defending PAP. The first strategy relies on intuitions about particular cases. The second strategy depends on a particular theoretical approach to the problem of moral luck. I will also provide an error theory for the anti-PAP intuitions generated by Frankfurt Cases.

“Blame and Anger, More or Less”

Randolph Clarke, Florida State University

Abstract: Angry blame is both anger and blame. Yet, how angry one is in angry blame need not match how much one blames. One can blame a lot but not be very angry, or be very angry but not blame a lot. Moreover, it can be fitting that one is so, for there are considerations that affect how angry it is fitting to feel that do not similarly affect how much it is fitting to blame. Anger is fittingly partial or positional in ways that blame is not.