

Association for the Advancement of Philosophy and Psychiatry

Call for Abstracts

35th ANNUAL MEETING, May 6-7, 2024

New York City

Co-sponsored and hosted by The City University of New York (CUNY) Graduate Center, Department of Philosophy

Keynote Speakers:

Phoebe Friesen, Ph.D., McGill University

Helena Hansen, M.D., Ph.D., University of California, Los Angeles

May 6: Placebos, Unconventional Interventions, and Therapeutic Effects: The Roles of Context, Expectation, and Hope in Clinical Care

May 7: Open Topic

Conference co-chairs: G. Scott Waterman, Peter Zachar, and Phoebe Friesen

May 6: Placebos

As Jennifer Harrington has pointed out, the term ‘placebo’ connotes several complex and conflicted meanings: 1) a “sugar pill” used to trick patients into feeling better, 2) the so-called “non-specific” factors (e.g., expectations, context) in clinical trials that must be controlled for in order to assess the efficacies of new treatments, and 3) a powerful healing phenomenon that operates across what are commonly conceived of as “psychological” and “somatic” realms. These diverse uses and meanings all make their way into the fields of mental health care, where placebo effects raise an array of conceptual and clinical questions and dilemmas that comprise the theme of this conference.

Possible topics for the conference include but are not limited to:

- What is the best or most useful way to define “placebo” or “placebo effect”?
- Are the mechanisms that are causally responsible for placebo phenomena part of what defines placebos or distinguishes them from non-placebos?
- What are the implications for the nature of disorders of their differential responsiveness to placebos? For example, depression and pain show much higher placebo-response rates than psychosis or obsessive-compulsive disorder. Are the former somehow more “psychological” than the latter? How does one understand the wide range of placebo responsiveness?

- What are the implications of superiority over placebo-control outcomes having become the “gold standard” by which efficacy of clinical intervention is determined?
- Are factors that are common across forms of psychotherapy – expectation, hope, interpersonal support – validly understood as placebos? If so, is the notion of “placebo control” applicable to studies of psychotherapy efficacy? How should studies of efficacy of psychotherapies be designed and interpreted?
- Are favorable responses to treatments whose purported mechanisms of therapeutic action are scientifically implausible (i.e., many “complementary and alternative” therapies) validly conceived as placebo effects?
- What constitutes adequate informed consent for clinical use of treatments that are clearly, or likely, placebic?
- What are the ethical and epistemic implications of “open-label placebos” in which deception is not required for effectiveness?
- How do narratives related to placebos and placebo research interact with stereotypes related to gender, race, disability, etc?
- How can medical care maximize the benefits of placebo effects while upholding ethical standards related to patient autonomy and collaborative care?

May 7: Open Topic

Any topic that addresses philosophical issues relevant to psychiatry or psychiatric issues that are relevant to philosophy is acceptable. Psychiatric and psychological themes can address any issue in psychiatric/psychological education, research, diagnosis, or mental health care. The psychiatric issues should have clear philosophical implications or demonstrate the importance of philosophical positions in psychiatric work.

Clinical reports or reflections that do not advance philosophical understanding or talks on general topics in philosophy or cognitive science without relevance to psychiatry or mental health, broadly understood, are unlikely to be accepted for presentation.

Presentations will be strictly limited to 20 minutes, followed by 10 minutes for discussion. Detailed abstracts should be 500-600 words in length and sent via email by December 1, 2023, to Scott Waterman (Scott.Waterman@uvm.edu), Peter Zachar (pzachar@uam.edu), and Phoebe Friesen (Phoebe.Friesen@mcgill.ca). Abstracts will be peer reviewed blindly, so the author's identifying information should be attached separately. A few scholarships of \$500 will be available to students presenting their work; please indicate if you would like to be considered for one of these scholarships. Please note whether the abstract is for May 6 (placebos) or May 7 (open topic). Notices of acceptance or rejection will be distributed in January.

The AAPP is committed to facilitating access to our events. The conference will be open to all, free of charge, and held in an ADA-accessible building. If you have access requests or have questions about the access provided, please contact Phoebe Friesen at Phoebe.Friesen@mcgill.ca