

**Charles Phelps Taft Research Center  
at the University of Cincinnati  
Graduate Enrichment Award**

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All required materials must be included in a single document, uploaded to the electronic submissions system, no later than 5PM on the published day of the deadline. Departmental review is required for this program, as well as a letter of support. Applicants should submit their application with enough time to receive departmental review prior to the close of the deadline. Taft does not accept an obligation to review applications that have not received intradepartmental review by the close of the deadline.

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**I. General Information**

- a. Name: **XXXXXXX**
- b. M#: **XXXXXX**
- c. Department: **XXXXXX**
- d. Position: **PhD Candidate, Graduate Assistant**
- e. Project Title: **Complexity and Social Explanation Workshop**
- f. Time Period: **February 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> 2020**
- g. Travel Location (if applicable):
- h. Travel Dates (if applicable):
- i. Probable Results of a Grant (such as publications, working papers, and presentations): **A chapter of my dissertation that also will be sent out for publication.**

**II. Budget**

- a. Transportation: **See section e**
- b. Direct Research Costs: **See section e**
- c. Per Diem: **See section e**
- d. Total Amount Requested from Taft: **\$2500**

Have you already or will you in the future apply for other grants for this project, including departmental support?

- e. Budgetary Summary:

**Flights: \$850**

Sally Haslanger. \$398 (BOS <--> CVG)

Deborah Tollefsen. \$452 (MEM<--> CVG)

**Hotel: \$505 \* 2 = \$1010**

Fairfield Inn & Suites: \$149 \* 3 nights \* 3 people

Tax and Fees = \$75

**Shuttle = \$42 \* 2 = \$84**

**Food for the workshop (20 participants): \$1050**

Lunch: \$350

Breaks: \$200

Dinner: \$500

**Honorarium: \$500\*2=\$1000**

**Total: \$3994**

### **III. Taft Grant History**

Please list your grant history with Taft for the last 5 years, in reverse chronological order, including project title, grant type, grant date, and amount of award, as well as project development subsequent to the grant, e.g. publication.

\$2500 Taft Co-Lab grant (awarded to Vanessa Carbonell and Sahar Heydari Fard) to host the Midwest-SWIP meeting in 2019

\$386 Conference Travel Grant, 2018

\$500 Conference Travel Grant, 2017

### **IV. Project Narrative**

I am applying for the student enrichment award to organize a small workshop with the goal of receiving extensive feedback on my dissertation in a workshop setting. My dissertation lays on the intersection of two historically more or less disconnected fields, namely philosophy of science and feminist normative scholarship on social intervention. The main contribution of my project is to bridge the gap between these two fields of inquiry by using the empirical and philosophical work on complexity and dynamicity as well as the scholarly work on intersectionality and social intervention. In my dissertation, I benefit from the work of feminist philosophers who discuss the challenges of theorizing complex, dynamic, and simultaneous effects of social inequalities as well as the shortcomings of the traditional methods of intervention. I also use insights from philosophers of science and complexity to discuss the philosophical and ethical implications of acknowledging the complex and dynamic nature of these inequalities.

The interdisciplinary nature of my project, however, has made it extremely difficult for me to receive comprehensive feedback on my work. Although my dissertation committee is composed of an ethicist and philosophers of science and complexity, I don't have the opportunity to interact with feminist philosophers concerned with complexity and social explanation. In fact, while there is a rapidly developing set of discussions on the implications of complex dynamic systems theory for biological, cognitive, and social systems, there has been no discussion about this theory in feminist philosophy and feminist ethics. Thus, with the support of my committee members and few feminist philosophers, I decided to organize a small workshop with two main goals: first, to receive extensive feedback on my dissertation, and second, to bring attention to my work by starting the conversation between philosophers of science and feminist philosophers who are concerned with explanation and complexity.

### **Background:**

Theorizing the social world although necessary or at least extremely helpful, is challenging. To address the special challenges of explaining the social world, social scientists and philosophers of social science have a multiplicity of competing theories. Among those theories, methodological individualism and structural/functionalism are two of the most influential accounts with distinct sets of assumptions and requirements for a good explanation. However, both these accounts struggle with inadequacies and shortcomings that have been the topic of debates for at least a century. Moreover, the advancement in and accessibility of computational methods in the later parts of the twentieth century has led to distinct and alternative frameworks of explanation that start with the assumption of complexity and dynamic interaction among the components of a system. This alternative framework that relies on complex dynamic system theory has the promise of obviating the problems of traditional frameworks, like individualism and functionalism, without introducing new ones. It is also compatible with the insights about and expectations of a good explanation common among socially concerned thinkers and liberatory scholars.

The driving concern of this workshop can be summarized by the following question: How can replacing the traditional accounts of social explanation like individualism or functionalism with the complex dynamic systems approach can inform and guide our moral response to social problems related to race and gender? In fact, a complete understanding of a social phenomenon with moral

significance, like oppression<sup>1</sup> or various forms of social inequalities, needs to account for not only its harms but also the causes of those harms (Cudd, 2005, p. 22). For instance, the causal explanation of the unemployment of Khalid, a young black man, informs and constrains the proper moral evaluation of his situation. If the unemployment is voluntary and a matter of free and informed choice<sup>2</sup>, the moral status of Khalid's unemployment is different than if his unemployment is the result of an employer's unfair discrimination against African Americans. Recognizing the appropriate moral response to a problem also requires a causal explanation that partially determines and constrains the options for intervention. Given that a causal explanation can differ depending on its underlying method of explanation and underlying methodological and metaphysical assumptions, the conceptual explanatory framework used by the individuals, groups, or institutions to inform their moral diagnosis and their moral response becomes morally significant.

There are abundant examples of the indirect influence of an explanatory framework and method of explanation on determining a proper moral response. For instance, different traditions in feminist thought have proposed different theories of what causes gender oppression, and therefore offered different solutions. Liberal feminism that relies on individualism to explain gender oppression defines patriarchy as consisting in the discriminatory attitudes of sexist men. Thus, the aim of liberal feminism is to change and replace such problematic attitudes that cause inequality and disadvantage for women. Marxist feminism and Marxist thought in general are known for their use of functional models of explanation. Marxist feminism defines patriarchy in its relation to class oppression. Hence, at least according to some of its advocates, eliminating class oppression is the proper goal of feminist action. Meanwhile, Socialist feminists rely on a systems account of explanation and argue that oppression is systematic, and systems are interdependent. Relying on such interdependency, Socialist feminists argue that the proper target of feminist intervention cannot be just patriarchy or the system that oppresses and punishes women (Young 1990, Eisenstein 1979, Jaggar 1983). They argue that targeting patriarchy without targeting other interdependent systems is futile and potentially problematic.

Sally Haslanger (2019, 2018, 2017a, 2017b, ...) and Deb Tollefsen (2017, 2019) are among the famous feminist philosophers who emphasize the inadequacy of traditional methods of explanation in finding the proper cause of social problems related to race and gender. These philosophers argue that

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<sup>1</sup> By oppression I mean a social circumstance that brings about an oppressed life in a systemic and wrongful way. Such an effect can be persistent and present in nearly all domains of an individual's life (Silvermint, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> This is assuming that it is possible to choose freely.

not only do these traditional methods fail to explain the reality and complexity of the social world, but also relying on these methods can lead to faulty and harmful interventions. There are many instances of well-intentioned and well-studied social interventions that have led to worse outcomes for the very individuals that they tried to help, as well as for society as a whole. For instance, the reductive and individualistic approaches underlying the rationale behind the policies related to the War on Poverty and War on Crime led to many families devastated and communities broken. These policies also consumed resources that could have been used for actual and long-lasting progress. Experts argue that in their explanation or intervention process these interventions dismiss the interrelationships among individuals, communities, and their environment, as well as the importance and emergence of elements like culture or group identity.

The problems of the traditional methods of explanation are not limited to social systems. Many scholars have pointed out a similar set of troubles and inadequacies in the study of biological and cognitive systems. For instance, in his groundbreaking work *Discovery of Complexity*, Robert Richardson (UC) and his colleague<sup>3</sup> discuss the limitations of traditional approaches to explanation for understanding systems with well-integrated and interdependent components. They argue that using the wrong conceptual frameworks of explanation for complex and dynamic systems is in fact misleading. They also argue that the proper method of intervention for such biological systems requires attention to the interrelation between the components as well as the importance of time. In other words, similar to the feminist critique in the social context, Richardson argues that not only complex and dynamic biological systems cannot be adequately captured by the traditional frameworks of explanation, but interventions that are informed by such frameworks are ineffective.

For biological and cognitive systems, many philosophers of science endorse an alternative framework of explanation that relies on complex dynamic systems theory to address the shortcomings of the traditions approaches to explanation and intervention. The work of philosophers like Tony Chemero (UC) is an important example of the application of complex dynamic systems theory in theorizing cognition. However, the application of complex dynamic systems theory to conceptualizing social inequalities is more challenging than its application to biological and cognitive domains. First, the practical difficulties and the ethical complications of gathering the necessary data that allows the study of complexity in the social world has slowed down the progress for the application of complex dynamic system theory. Second, theorizing oppression and the various aspects of some social inequalities is not a purely descriptive project.

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<sup>3</sup> William Bechtel

The goal of my dissertation is to use the philosophical and empirical work on complexity and complex dynamical systems theory to aid the project of conceptualizing the effect of and the proper response to complex, dynamic, and simultaneous social inequalities. This workshop is a unique opportunity for me to bring scholars like Sally Haslanger (MIT) and Deb Tollefsen (UM) to the same table with Robert Richardson (UC) and Tony Chemero (UC) who have agreed to participate in this workshop. Not only such a gathering can further the scholarly work on complexity and social explanation for inequality, it will create an ideal environment for me to receive extensive feedback on my dissertation. Moreover, other faculty members at UC philosophy department agreed to participate in the workshop in various capacities. The list of these faculty members includes but is not limited to Robert Richardson, Tony Chemero, Angela Potochnik, Robert Skipper, and Tom Polger. The workshop will also benefit from the presence and participation of other graduate students who have relevant or similar work.

### The Structure of the Workshop

To maximize time for discussion, papers on the program will be read in advance by all participants. Each session will consist of short presentations by two commentators, followed by a brief response by the author(s). After hearing the response by the author(s), the participants will share their feedback and ask their questions. Thus, not only every presenter will receive extensive feedback on their work from the commentators, they will have a chance to receive feedback from all other participants in Q and A.

#### Invited external speakers include:

**Sally Haslanger** (Ford Professor of Philosophy and Women's and Gender Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology) (CONFIRMED)

Professor Haslanger's work is in social and political philosophy, feminist theory, and critical race theory. She has publications on the problem of resistance through change, objectivity and objectification, Cathrine MacKinnon's theory of gender, and the metaphysical conception of social construction. Her book *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique* (Oxford 2012) focuses on the role of social and cultural critique in the reformation of social structures and in progressive social change. The book collects her papers concerning gender, race, and the family and was awarded the 2014 Joseph B. Gittler Prize for "outstanding scholarly contribution in the field of the philosophy of one or more of the social sciences." Haslanger also has important work on social practices, social structure, structural explanation, and topics in feminist epistemology. Her primary

focus is on the notion of ideology and the way it links to contemporary work in epistemology, philosophy of mind, philosophy of science, and related sciences. She has co-edited three books that further reflect the breadth of her interests: with Elizabeth Hackett, *Theorizing Feminisms: A Reader* (Oxford 2005); with Charlotte Witt, *Adoption Matters: Philosophical and Feminist Essays* (Cornell 2005); and with Roxanne Marie Kurtz, *Persistence: Contemporary Readings* (MIT Press 2006). Moreover, Haslangar was the founder and convener of the Women in Philosophy Task Force and co-founded PIKSI-Boston, a summer philosophy institute for undergraduates from under-represented groups. She was awarded the Martin Luther King, Jr. Leadership Award at MIT in 2014 and the YWCA Cambridge Tribute to Outstanding Women in 2011. In 2013-4, Haslangar was the President of the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association, and in 2015, she was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

**Deborah Tollefsen** (Professor of Philosophy and the Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, University of Memphis) (INVITATION CONTINGENT ON FUNDING)

Professor Tollefsen's research and teaching interests include philosophy of mind, social epistemology, and social ontology. Her work has appeared in such journals as *Episteme*, *Review of Philosophy and Psychology*, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, *Philosophical Explorations*, and *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* and concerns topics such as group testimony, collective moral responsibility, joint action, co-authorship, and group knowledge. Her book *Groups as Agents* (2015) appeared in Polity Press and discusses a fundamentally non-reductive epistemology. Tollefsen also co-authored a book titled *Flavors of Togetherness: Experimental Philosophy and Theories of Joint Action* (Oxford University Press, 2015) in which she discusses different aspects of embodied collective action.

## Schedule of Events

The workshop will be organized into two types of sessions: the invited speakers' sessions, with 40 minutes for presentation, 20 minutes for comments, and 30 minutes for discussion, and Graduate Student sessions, with 20 minutes for comments, 10 minutes for a response from the author, and 40 minutes for discussion. There will be a 20-minute networking break after each presentation.

22-Feb	Time	Speaker
	9:00 to 10:30	Sally Haslangar

10:50 to 12:00 Sahar Heydari Fard

Lunch

1:00 to 2:30 Tony Chemero

2:50 to 4:00 Jonathon McKinney

Dinner

23-Feb

9:00 to 10:30 Deb Tollefsen

10:50 to 12:00 Daniel James



