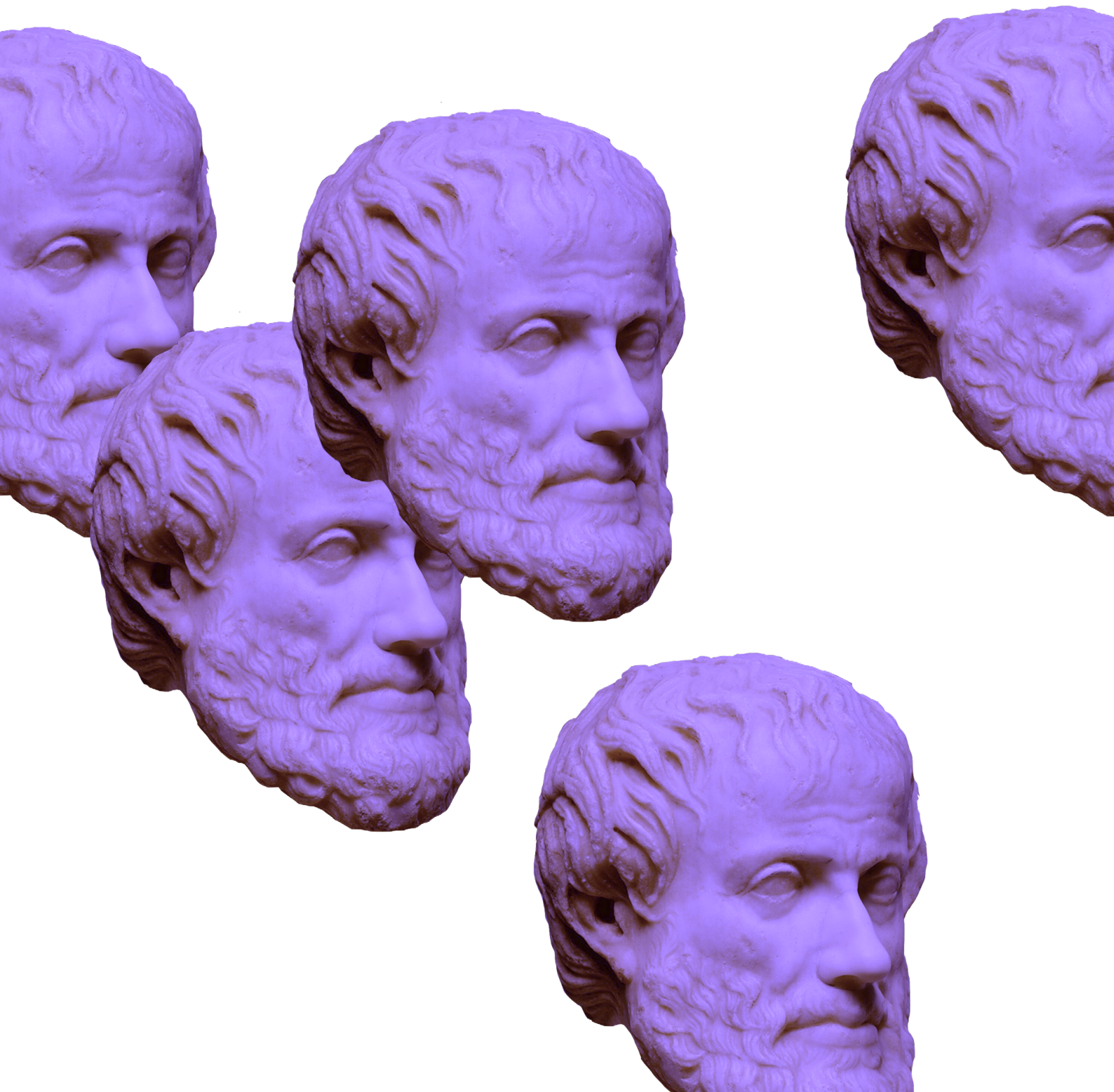


Neo-Aristotelian Perspectives on Persistence and De Re Modality

International Workshop
21-23 Oct 2021, Online



About this Workshop

After a long predominance of Humeans such as Willard V.O. Quine or David Lewis, the revival of Aristotelian ideas marks a fundamental turning point in the recent history of metaphysics. Those who take the neo-Aristotelian point of view are thereby challenged to fundamentally rethink pivotal concepts and questions. Even about 30 years after the groundbreaking work of e.g. Kit Fine, E. J. Lowe or David Wiggins in the 1980s and 1990s, this process is still ongoing.

The workshop *Neo-Aristotelian Perspectives on Persistence and De Re Modality* deals with neo-Aristotelian views on two central and closely related metaphysical issues: persistence and de re modality. One aim is to (further) pursue the neo-Aristotelian appropriation of both topics. Another is to bring into closer contact various developments that, although subsumed under the term *neo-Aristotelianism*, still proceed in relative isolation from each other. Finally, the workshop gives some space for critical reflections on various parts of the neo-Aristotelian movement.

The workshop is organised by Dirk Franken (Heidelberg/Mainz) and Florian Fischer (Siegen) as part of a cooperation between the **Department of Philosophy Mainz** and the **Society of Philosophy of Time (SPoT)**. The **German Research Foundation (DFG)** is supporting the event with generous funding.

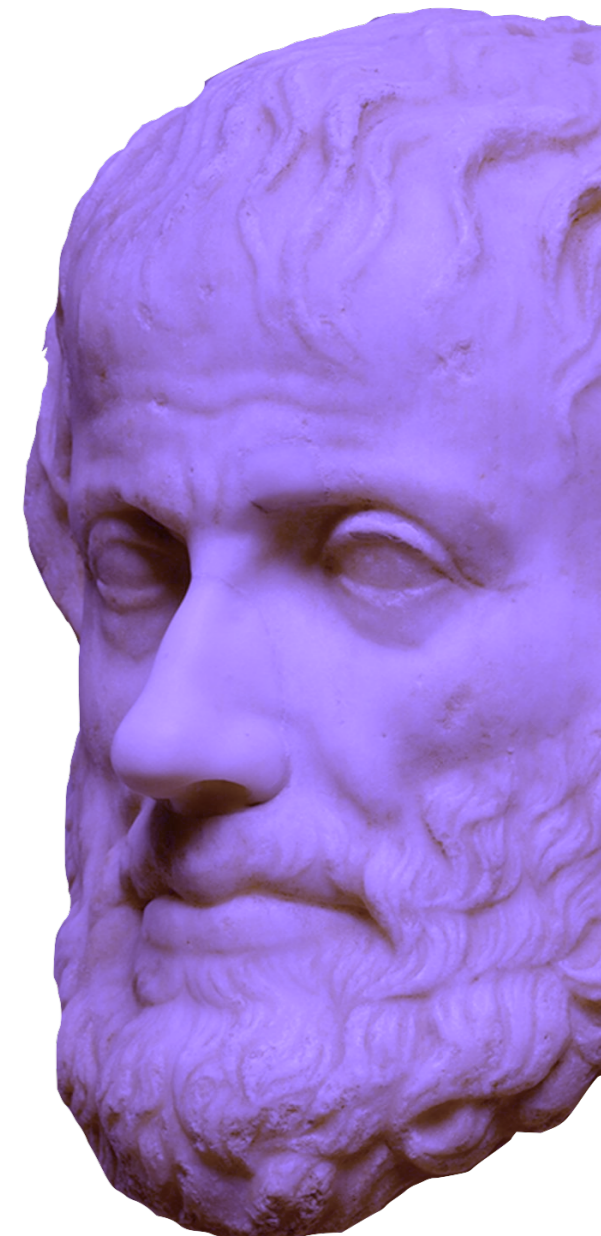
The results of the workshop are planned to be published in a special issue of a renowned philosophy journal.

Participation

The workshop will be held online via Zoom. All participants are welcome. Please send a short email to now@spotime.org to let us know you would like to attend. You will receive a hyperlink in due course.

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Schedule

Thursday, 21 October

- 09.00 – 09.15 Workshop Opening
- 09.15 – 10.15 [1] Thomas B. Sattig (University of Tübingen)
Persistence and Mereological Structure
- 10.30 – 11.30 [2] Fabrice Correia (University of Geneva)
Non-Modal Conceptions of Essence in Contemporary Metaphysics
- 11.45 – 12.45 [3] Howard Robinson (Central European University, Rutgers University)
How Much of the Aristotelian Revival Is Really Locke or Kant – With Special Reference to Wiggins on Sortals and Identity?
- Lunch
- 14.15 – 15.15 [4] Dirk Franken (University of Heidelberg, University of Mainz)
Existence and Persistence: On the Double Role of Aristotelian Forms
- 15.45 – 16.45 [5] Mark Jago (University of Nottingham)
Knowing How Things Might Have Been
- 17.15 – 18.15 [6] Simon J. Evnine (University of Miami)
The Historicity of Artifacts: Use and Counter-Use

Friday, 22 October

- 09.00 – 10.00 [7] Harold Noonan (University of Nottingham) & Benjamin Curtis (Nottingham Trent University)
Scepticism About Aristotelian Essences
- 10.15 – 11.15 [8] Ralf Busse (University of Mainz)
No Foundations for Metaphysical Coherentism
- 11.30 – 12.30 [9] David S. Oderberg (University of Reading)
Who's Afraid of Reverse Mereological Essentialism?
- Lunch
- 14.00 – 15.00 [10] Sònia Roca Royes (University of Stirling)
Metaphysics of Objects, Conceptual Engineering, and Knowledge of Essence
- 15.30 – 16.30 [11] John Pemberton (LSE, Oxford, Durham)
Aristotle's Alternative to Enduring and Perduring: Lasting
- 17.00 – 18.00 [12] Jeffrey E. Brower (Purdue University)
Aquinas' Metaphysics of Motion

Saturday, 23 October

- 10.00 – 11.00 [13] Tuomas Tahko (University of Bristol)
Possibility Precedes Actuality
- 11.15 – 12.15 [14] Anna Marmodoro (Durham University)
Instantiation
- Lunch
- 13.45 – 14.45 [15] Barbara Vetter (FU Berlin)
Modal Epistemology for Neo-Aristotelians
- 15.15 – 16.15 [16] Florian Fischer (University of Siegen)
Modality within the Triadic Process Account of Dispositions
- 16.45 – 17.45 [17] Alan Sidelle (University of Wisconsin-Madison)
Dispositional Essentialism and the Necessity of Laws: A Deflationary Account
- 18.00 End of Workshop

All time designations are central European time (CET). Maximum presentation time: 45 Minutes.

Chairs

- Talks [1] – [3] Dirk Franken
- Talks [4] – [6] Howard Robinson
- Talk [7] Florian Fischer
- Talk [8] – [9] Sònia Roca Royes
- Talk [10] – [12] Ralf Busse
- Talk [13] – [14] Barbara Vetter
- Talk [15] – [16] Anna Marmodoro
- Talk [17] Tuomas Tahko

Aquinas' Metaphysics of Motion

Friday, 17.00 – 18.00

In this paper, I provide a framework for thinking about Aquinas' metaphysics of motion. I begin by locating his views about motion within the context of his broadly Aristotelian metaphysics of potentiality, actuality, and change and then explore the sense in which Aquinas takes motion to qualify as a distinctive type of potentiality with a distinctive mode of persistence.

No Foundations for Metaphysical Coherentism

Friday, 10.15 – 11.15

Recently, metaphysical coherentism has been advanced as an alternative to orthodox foundationalism (and infinitism). According to coherentism, there is no fundament of metaphysically independent things or facts. Instead, things or facts stand in reciprocal relations of metaphysical dependence. In the talk, I question the phenomenological support that coherentists claim for their view (leaving a discussion of alleged theoretic advantages for another occasion). I introduce three phenomenological deficits – superficiality, ambiguity, and insubstantiality – and illustrate them by simple examples. I then sketch a critical case study, in which the three deficits are shown to apply to a coherentist interpretation of quantum entanglement. Finally, I highlight insubstantiality as the deepest problem: metaphysical dependence is intimately linked to explanation, but coherentists only claim reciprocal explanation in the abstract without being able to substantiate that abstract claim by a detailed, concrete first-order metaphysics. In sum, foundationalists need not and should not be impressed by the coherentist's challenge.

Non-Modal Conceptions of Essence in Contemporary Metaphysics

Thursday, 10.30 – 11.30

I discuss the non-modal conceptions of essence that have been put forward after Kit Fine's seminal paper *Essence and Modality* (1994), as well as the view, advocated by Fine, that it is metaphysical modality that should be understood in terms of essence rather than the other way around.

Jeffrey E. Brower

Purdue University

Ralf Busse

University of Mainz

Fabrice Correia

University of Geneva

The Historicity of Artifacts: Use and Counter-Use

Thursday, 17.15 – 18.15

In an attempt to capture some of the social and political import of Sara Ahmed's concept of *queer use*, I extend my hylomorphic account of artifacts in two ways. The first way is to allow that users can also be creators; the second allows multiple users to create jointly if they constitute what Benedict Anderson calls an »imagined community«.

*Modality within the Triadic Process
Account of Dispositions*

Saturday, 15.15 – 16.15

According to one type of actualist theory, modality is anchored in dispositions. The basic idea is that something is possible if it is the manifestation of actually existing dispositions. I favour a triadic account of dispositions that, completely contrary to Hume, includes a level of *Wirkungen* between dispositions and resulting behaviour. I will give an exact account of possibility and necessity in terms of these *Wirkungen* and discuss them in comparison to other dispositionalist theories of modality.

*Existence and Persistence: On the Double
Role of Aristotelian Forms*

Thursday, 14.15 – 15.15

According to so-called principle-based hylomorphism, the forms of composite objects are principles of unity. Basically, an object's principle of unity is the specification of a structure such that the object exists, if it exists, (partly) in virtue of the realization of this structure by certain more fundamental particulars. Almost without exception, these structures are regarded as spatial structures. This restriction to spatial structures, however, ignores the temporal dimension of an object's existence. Objects persist; and even if they don't, they have persistence-conditions. What is more, the hylemorphist cannot remain silent on these matters. An object's persistence-conditions are part of what makes the object the kind of object it is. Hence, any adequate account of an object's form needs to incorporate an account of what it is for an object to have specific persistence-conditions.

There is an easy way to meet this requirement. The hylemorphist might maintain that an object's principle of unity requires the realization of both spatial and temporal structures. I argue that, in this case, the easy way is the wrong one. If an object's having a particular form required the realization of a temporal structure, the object could not exist without persisting. But that is false. Persistence is

Simon J. Evnine

University of Miami

Florian Fischer

University of Siegen

Dirk Franken

University of Heidelberg,
University of Mainz

the staying in existence of an already existing object, which is why existence precedes persistence. To avoid the above falsehood, the hylemorphist should accept that an object's form has itself an internal complexity. Only one of its components is a principle of unity that specifies the conditions of the object's existence. The other might be called a principle of continuity. Its role is to equip the object with persistence-conditions once it comes to existence. If these conditions remain unfulfilled, that does not affect the object's existence. It just means that the object fails to persist.

Knowing How Things Might Have Been

Thursday, 15.45 – 16.45

Mark Jago

University of Nottingham

I know that I could have been where you are right now and that you could have been where I am right now, but that neither of us could have been turnips or natural numbers. This knowledge of metaphysical modality stands in need of explanation. I will offer an account based on our knowledge of the natures, or essences, of things. I will argue that essences need not be viewed as metaphysically bizarre entities; that we can conceptualise and refer to essences; and that we can gain knowledge of them. We can know about which properties are, and which properties are not, essential to a given entity. This knowledge of essence offers a route to knowledge of the ways those entities must be or could be.

Instantiation

Saturday, 11.15 – 12.15

Anna Marmodoro

Durham University

What is it, metaphysically, for an universal property to be instantiated *in* a concrete particular, and for a concrete particular to instantiate an universal property? The mainstream approach is to take an universal property to be in a concrete particular by being a *part* of it. Two issues arise from this stance: What kind of *part* can a property be, in a physical object? And how can a property, as such, *recur* in multiple physical objects at the same time (which is presupposed by those who use recurrence to explain resemblance), and thus be a part of each of them? These two issues have put instantiation under critical fire, with some claiming it to be a 'bankrupt' idea. This bears directly on whether Aristotle's metaphysics of objects and their properties is approached as philosophically valuable to us, or to be junked, in relation to progress in current research in metaphysics.

In this paper I argue against those interpretations according to which Aristotle accounts for the instantiation of properties in objects by positing a *compositional relation* between properties and matter, or alternatively a *mereological relation* between properties and objects. I offer my own understanding of Aristotle's position, and then attempt taking a step further. I argue that for Aristotle, an instantiated property is *in* an object, but neither as a *part*, nor as *related* to its matter; rather, properties are in objects as *qualifications of a prime metaphysical subject*. My further step is to argue that this move, and not holism (contrary to what some have argued, both among scholars and contemporary followers of Aristotle), also explains the oneness of objects.

Scepticism About Aristotelian Essences

Friday, 9.00 – 10.00

Harold Noonan &
Benjamin Curtis

University of Nottingham/
Nottingham Trent University

In our presentation we will outline our scepticism about the whole notion of Aristotelian essence. In short, we do not see why we should admit that there are any such things as Aristotelian essences. Such things are mysterious, and so far as we can see we have no need to admit their existence. Some (but not neo-Aristotelians) think we can explain the notion of essence in terms of *de re* necessity. We doubt this, but will not dispute this claim in our presentation. What we will dispute, however, is the neo-Aristotelian claim that we can explain *de re* necessity in terms of an independently intelligible notion of essence. Moreover, we think that everything that needs to be explained that prompts people to speak of Aristotelian essences can be explained purely in terms of (at most) *de dicto* necessity.

Who's Afraid of Reverse Mereological Essentialism?

Friday, 11.30 – 12.30

David S. Oderberg

University of Reading

Whereas mereological essentialism is the thesis that the parts of an object are essential to it, reverse mereological essentialism is the thesis that the whole is essential to its parts. Specifically – since RME is an Aristotelian doctrine – it is a claim not about objects in general but about substances. Here I set out and explain RME as it should be understood from the perspective of the Aristotelian-Scholastic tradition, as well as proposing a kind of master argument for believing it. A number of objections (many of which have been raised by Kathrin Koslicki or Robert Koons) are then considered, the replies to which help further to clarify and motivate RME. The final section considers the curate's egg that is Ross Inman's recent defence of RME, which he calls Substantial Priority.

Aristotle's Alternative to Enduring and Perduring: Lasting

Friday, 15.30 – 16.30

John Pemberton

LSE, Oxford, Durham

Aristotle supposes that both things (e.g. substances, artefacts, elements) and motions (kineses) exist through some period of time and are ontologically prior to their temporal parts. I dub such temporal holism *lasting*. Lasting things are unlike enduring things in that they have temporal parts; and unlike perduring things in that their temporal parts are not actual, but rather are potential (they may be abstracted from the whole – they do not compose the whole). Lasting, that is Aristotle's persisting, is thus a distinctive alternative to enduring and perduring. I assess this alternative showing it to be attractive.

How Much of the Aristotelian Revival Is Really Locke or Kant – With Special Reference to Wiggins on Sortals and Identity?

Thursday, 11.45 – 12.45

In the first brief section, I will make some comments on the use of the notion of essence in Aristotle, Locke and Putnam/Kripke. In particular, I'll be disagreeing with some things David Charles says. In the second very brief section, I'll follow Anna Marmodoro in denying that Aristotle's use of »power« has anything to do with the contemporary sense, which owes more to Locke and Boscovitch. The moral of these sections is that *not everything non-Humean is Aristotelian*. The third section discusses Wiggins' attempt, mainly in his 2001 and 2016, to base the Aristotelian doctrine of substance on the logic of identity. Among other things, I will draw attention to the fact that his theory commits him to Williamson's views on vagueness.

Metaphysics of Objects, Conceptual Engineering, and Knowledge of Essence

Friday, 14.00 – 15.00

This will be an exploratory talk that builds off my inductive, non-rationalist epistemology of modality about material entities. I have distinguished in the past the knowability conditions of ordinary possibilities, such as *this climbing rope could break*, from those of essential facts (and associated impossibilities), arguing that an account of the epistemology of essential facts *ought* to represent our knowledge of them as less securely grounded than the inductive route provides for the less challenging possibilities, like the breakability of the climbing rope. Abduction – as an epistemology of essential facts about *concreta* – would fit the bill here. The lesser probative force of the envisioned abductive argument generates, however, a sceptical concern about its outputs. Conceptual engineering comes in at this dialectical moment to remedy this. I will suggest the following normative decision: that our concepts should be so fashioned as to refer to the largest – in a sense to be explained – modally extended entities for whose existence *we have direct evidence*, regardless of whether, *metaphysically*, these entities are just proper parts of »larger« ones our unruléd concepts might have been onto. Once so fashioned, the sceptical concern disappears; and the greatest amount of *knowable* modal facts is enabled.

Persistence and Mereological Structure

Thursday, 09.15 – 10.15

Perdurance is a mode of persistence. The heart of perdurance is a space-time analogy: a perduring object is extended in time in a way that is analogous to how it is extended in space. This paper is a discus-

Howard Robinson

Central European University,
Rutgers University

Sònia Roca Royes

University of Stirling

Thomas B. Sattig

University of Tübingen

sion of perdurance in light of the distinction between mereologically structured and unstructured objects. I show that while the standard formulation of perdurance captures the space-time analogy for unstructured objects, it fails to capture the space-time analogy for structured objects.

Dispositional Essentialism and the Necessity of Laws: A Deflationary Account

Saturday, 16.45 – 17.45

There are two related claims that have lately garnered interest and currency: dispositional essentialism – the idea that some or all properties, or some or all fundamental properties, are essentially dispositional; and the claim that laws of nature, or again, at least many of them, or the fundamental ones, are metaphysically necessary. I have argued elsewhere (2002) that the laws of nature do not have a mind-independent metaphysical necessity, but recent developments on dispositions, much thanks due to Alexander Bird and Brian Ellis, have given these ideas a new vibrancy and made them the topic of more focused discussion. So I would like to revisit this again, arguing that the new work, as interesting and important as it is to our understanding of fundamental properties, powers and dispositions, should not change our minds about metaphysical necessity. One should still think that necessity is conceptually or conventionally grounded. I will not be arguing that laws of nature are *not* necessary, nor that properties do not have dispositional essences. I will only argue *if* there are these necessities, then, like other *de re* or empirical necessities, they have no metaphysical weight and are based in our rules or decisions about how to talk about and conceptualize the world. We may have excellent *reasons* to talk and think in this way – but these reasons do not include, require or provide evidence of mind-independent metaphysical necessity or essences.

Possibility Precedes Actuality

Saturday, 10.00 – 11.00

This paper is inspired by and develops on E. J. Lowe's work, who writes in his book *The Possibility of Metaphysics* that »metaphysical possibility is an inescapable determinant of actuality« (1998: 9). Metaphysics deals with possibilities – metaphysical possibilities – but is not able to determine what is actual without the help of empirical research. Accordingly, a delimitation of the space of possibilities is required. The resulting – controversial – picture is that we generally need to know whether something is possible before we can know whether it is actual. In order to appreciate this picture, we need to understand Lowe's slogan: »essence precedes existence« (Lowe 2008: 40). This slogan has both an ontological and an epistemic reading. The ontological reading is related to the now familiar idea that essence grounds modality, as popularised by Kit Fine. The epistemic reading suggests that we can know the essence of some entity before we know whether or not that entity exists. However, this idea is often met with puzzlement and Lowe himself sadly passed away before he had a chance to clarify this framework. I will present the idea as I understand it and put forward a qualified defence of it, illustrating the framework with a case study concerning the discovery of transuranic elements.

Alan Sidelle

University of Wisconsin-Madison

Tuomas Tahko

University of Bristol

Modal Epistemology for Neo-Aristotelians

Saturday, 13.45 – 14.45

Barbara Vetter

FU Berlin

Traditional empiricism objects to Aristolian concepts such as that of power on the grounds that they are epistemologically suspect. I argue, on the contrary, that knowledge of powers – in particular, of abilities and affordances – is both basic and early, and that it can provide the beginnings of a modal epistemology which is very much in line with neo-Aristotelian, powers-based metaphysics.

Notes

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