

ESSENCE, NECESSITY, AND IDENTITY

Venue: Room 00.212, Philosophicum II, Jakob-Welder-Weg 20.

PROGRAMME

Thursday, June 1st

10:00 – 11:00 Erica Shumener (Syracuse)

11:15 – 12:15 Martin Pleitz (unaffiliated)

Lunch

14:00 – 15:00 Jessica Leech (KCL)

15:15 – 16:15 Ralf Busse (Mainz)

Coffee

16:45 – 17:45 Dirk Franken (Mainz)

19:30 Workshop Dinner

Friday, June 2nd

10:00 – 11:00 Michael Peramatzis (Oxford)

11:15 – 12:15 Julio DeRizzo (Vienna)

Lunch

14:00 – 15:00 Tobias Wilsch (Tübingen)

Coffee

15:30 – 16:30 Martin Glazier (Geneva)

TITLES AND ABSTRACTS

Ralf Busse (Mainz)

Title: Two Uses of Metaphysical Explanation: On the Relation of Essence and Ground to Locutions of Identity

Abstract: The talk compares the thesis that essence and ground are the basic notions of metaphysics and together define an apparently identity-like but asymmetric locution with the antithesis that generalised identity is basic and defines essence and ground on the basis of propositional logic. It develops the synthesis that genuine identifications do play a role in metaphysics, but that essence and ground are the basic explanatory notions and that two different uses of them combine to provide evidence for identifications, without (generalised) identity being an explanatory notion itself.

Julio De Rizzo (Vienna)

Title: Modality and Myopia

Abstract: There are limits to how things might have been. However, tiny permissible differences between possibilities add up to large ones beyond those limits. The tension between these two claims lies at the heart of the so-called tolerance puzzle. In this talk I defend a novel response to this that relies mainly on two claims. First, that possibilities come in degrees and that degrees matter to how far de re knowledge about what is possible extends. Second, that metaphysical modality is inherently perspectival and that modal tolerance is sensitive to perspectives in modal space. I extend the solution to the main variants of the puzzle and compare it with a recent one based on a plenitude of entities.

Dirk Franken (Mainz)

Title: Definition, Existence, and Ontological Form

Abstract: Many, while not all, contemporary essentialists are prepared to affirm the following theses:

(a) Objects have individual—and not just general or generic—essences (i.e. there is something that makes an object the individual object it is—and not just something that makes it the kind of object it is). (b) It is possible in principle to express an object's essence by a real definition of this object. If (a) and (b) are true, it should be possible—at least in

many cases—to express an object’s individual essence by a real definition of this object. Call such a definition an individual definition. In my talk, I discuss two problems that arise for the notion of an individual definition, hoping that this discussion sheds some new light on the notion of an individual essence. The problem of the definiendum: An individual definition is meant to be the definition of an object. This suggests that the definiendum of an individual definition should be a singular term referring to the object defined. But that would render the sentence expressing the definition ungrammatical. So, what predicative expression could stand for the definiendum in an individual definition? It has been suggested that the predicate of being identical to the object defined could do the job. I reject this proposal on the basis of certain considerations about essence and grounding. In its place, I suggest that the proper expression of the definiendum is an expression of the object’s existence. The problem of necessity: For A to be the definiens of B, it must be true that, necessarily, if B, then A. But what is the source, if any, of this necessity? Essentialists use to assume that all necessities emerge from the essences of things. This idea, however, might turn out untenable if the necessary connection between definiens and definiendum is a condition for there being a real definition—an expression of essence—at all. I (carefully) suggest that the necessity in question has its source in the (ontologically) formal character of the relation between definiens and definiendum.

Martin Glazier (Geneva)

Title: Laws of Nature and Virtual Laws of Nature

Abstract: Many virtual worlds possess virtual laws of nature. For example, in a soccer video game, the ball will move according to a certain "virtual physics" when kicked by the player. The virtual laws are grounded in the program code, the sequence of instructions to be executed by the computer. The behavior of virtual objects is explained, in a relatively immediate way, by the execution of these instructions; and it is explained, in a relatively mediate way, by the virtual laws grounded in those instructions. Call this view computationalism. It is a form of anti-Humeanism about virtual laws, since it takes the laws to explain the "mosaic" of particular virtual facts and not vice versa. There is an analogous computationalist view of the physical laws of nature. On this view, the laws of nature are grounded in the sequence of instructions to be executed by the world. The behavior of physical objects is immediately explained by the execution of these instructions and is

mediately explained by the laws of nature grounded in those instructions. Computationalism provides an answer to the question (pressing for anti-Humeans) of what the supposed "governing" of events by laws amounts to and how it works.

Jessica Leech (KCL London)

Title: Identity, Necessity, and Zero-Grounding

Abstract: I will explore whether we can make sense of the notion of zero-grounding within a framework of generalized identity, and the extent to which this may give us a way to explain the necessity of identity.

Michail Peramatzis (Oxford)

Title: Aristotle on Unity in *Metaphysics* Z.12 and H.6

Abstract: Aristotle's inquiry into the definitional question 'what is substance?' in the central books of the *Metaphysics* is constrained by the unity requirement. Roughly, a particular hylomorphic compound substance, such as this human, ought to be a unified whole and not just a heap of material parts and form. A similar claim applies to the substance-kind, human, which *Metaphysics* ZH Θ characterises as a hylomorphic compound taken universally. I raise the following question about this picture of unity: Is a compound's unity basic or is it derived from the form's unity? Reading closely *Metaphysics* Z.12 and H.6, I argue that the form is explanatorily basic for the compound's unity.

Martin Pleitz (unaffiliated)

Title: Odd Identity

Abstract: Coming from Frege, it is natural to view metaphysical categories as aligned with grammatical types, with *objects* as what singular terms denote and *concepts* as what predicates express. This taxonomy of categories can be extended by means of type theory to what any sort of expression expresses. With a view to the quantifiers appropriate to the corresponding expressions, all items that are not objects can be called *higher-order items* (with objects being first-order items). They are all accepted as part of reality in *higher-order metaphysics*, which currently generates much interest. One important issue concerns higher-order identifications –generalized 'relations' of equivalence that can play the individuating role for a given range of higher-order items that numerical identity plays for objects (cf. work

on predicate-predicate identifications by Rayo and by Dorr and on sentence-sentence identifications by Fine and by Correia). A further higher-orderist idea generalizes first-order relations in another way by letting them connect items of different levels. A prime application, going back to pioneering work by Prior, is an alternative (“prenective”) analysis of propositional attitudes like belief as relating a person to a proposition construed not as an object but as a higher-order item (cf. Künne, Rosefeldt, Trueman, Jones). The project of my talk is to combine these two ideas and form a novel notion of *cross-categorical identification*, complementing the more established even identities of first and higher orders with appropriate *odd identities*. To characterize odd identity, describe how it interacts with even identities, and justify treating it as a sibling of familiar first-order identity, I will embed it in an ultra-generalized logic of equivalence. To prove its theoretical worth, I will use odd identity in an account of abstract objects like properties and propositions as resulting from the reification of corresponding higher-order items. We now have the formal resources to say in a grammatical and informative way that wisdom = is wise, the Pythagorean Theorem = $(a^2 + b^2 = c^2)$, etc. Construing the reificational connection that abstract objects bear to higher-order items as a form of *identity* will turn out to have several advantages, because with the help of associated transfer principles we can now elucidate their essence, explain their atemporality, and solve the Caesar problem raised by Frege for any abstractionist account.

Erica Shumener (Syracuse)

Title: The Distinctness of Objects Near and Far

Abstract: I argue that we can metaphysically explain the distinctness of objects *across* time if and only if we can metaphysically explain the distinctness of objects *at a time*. This is surprising because philosophers working on the metaphysics of persistence typically do not extend their views to synchronic identity and distinctness. Likewise, those attempting to explain synchronic identity and distinctness facts (for example, those trying to explain the distinctness of two qualitatively indiscernible spheres at a time) do not extend their explanations to persisting objects. I suggest that there is good reason to treat synchronic and diachronic distinctness facts as a unified package: we either explain both synchronic and diachronic distinctness facts or we don’t explain either synchronic or diachronic distinctness facts.

Tobias Wilsch (Tübingen)

Title: On Fine's Puzzle of Possible Non-Existence

Abstract: Since Socrates is essentially human, it is necessary that he is human. But since it is possible that he doesn't exist, it follows that it is possible (for Socrates and everyone else) to be human and not to exist. This is puzzling. Fine uses this puzzle to argue for his distinction between worldly and transcendental truth: being human is a transcendental affair, which is independent from such worldly matters as existence. As I am opposed to that distinction, I will seek a different solution that relies on an inferential disconnect between modality de re and de dicto: Socrates is necessarily human, but it is not necessary that he is human.