

**4nd Annual
Weber Graduate Philosophy Conference
San Diego, CA**



**SAN DIEGO STATE
UNIVERSITY**

Conrad Prebys Student Union Building, SDSU

Saturday & Sunday, October, 18-19, 2014

**Funded by the Institute for Ethics and Public Affairs
and Charles Wei-hsun Fu Foundation**

Saturday, October 18, 2014

01. 8:00 Aron Burnett // Aztlan
“A Hermeneutic Defense of the “Special” Meaning of Metaphors”
U. North Florida
02. 9:00 Wes Siscoe // Aztlan
“Back to Minimalism: A Critique of Cheryl Misak’s Peircean Conception of Truth”
Northern Illinois University
03. 10:00 Jordan Corner // Aztlan
“Why is Bill like a Bulldozer? A Defense of Kendall Walton’s Account of Metaphor as Prop-Oriented Make-Believe”
University at Albany, SUNY
04. 11:00 Ezra Cook // Aztlan
“Intensional Operators are Unnecessary for a Type-Driven Interpretation of Natural Language, and it is Unclear Why Anyone Should Want Them in the First Place”
Northwestern University
05. 12:00 **KEYNOTE** – Alice Crary // Theatre
“Feminism, Ethics and the Underrepresentation of Women in Philosophy”
New School for Social Research
06. 1:00 David Daise // Aztlan
“Signifying Slurs: Sign Theory and the Origin and Nature of Slurs’ Offensiveness”
Pennsylvania State University
07. 2:00 Alejandro Tamez // Aztlan
“Wittgenstein and I”
Texas State University
08. 3:00 Dylan Daniel // Aztlan
“The Lexicultural Propagation of Concepts”
Texas State University
09. 4:00 Quoc Thai // Aztlan
“Against Semantic Externalism in the Brain-in-a-vat Thought Experiment”
University of Houston

10. 5:00 **KEYNOTE** – Kenneth Taylor // Theatre
“Selfhood as Self-Representation”
Stanford

Sunday, October 19, 2014

11. 8:00 Elis Miller // Aztlan
“Forming a Coherent Picture: Wittgenstein’s proposition as a ruler”
University of New Mexico
12. 9:00 Kurt Blankschaen // Aztlan
“Generic Consistency and Well-Being”
University of Kansas
13. 10:00 Brian Thomas // Aztlan
“Wittgenstein’s Private Language”
San Diego State University
14. 11:00
KEYNOTE: Michael Devitt // Theatre
“Testing Theories of Reference”
CUNY
15. 12:00 Erlantz Etxeberria // Aztlan
“On Self-Directed Irony”
University of Colorado at Boulder
16. 1:00 Michael Fitzpatrick // Aztlan
“Form, Meaning, Facts”
Stanford University
17. 2:00 Corbin Casarez // State Suite
“Resisting Criticisms of Communicative-Intention Theories of Meaning via Strawson’s Normative Account of Sentence-Meaning”
Loyola University Chicago
18. 2:00 Alex Kaiserman // Aztlan
“Normative Causation”
University of Oxford, Princeton University (visiting).

19. 3:00 **KEYNOTE** – John M. Fischer //
Theatre
***Libertarianism and the Problem of
Metaphysical Flipflopping***
U.C. Riverside

ABSTRACTS:

01. Aron Burnett – U. North Florida
***“A Hermeneutic Defense of the “Special”
Meaning of Metaphors”***

The objective of this paper is to defend through Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic approach a subjective and creative understanding of the use of metaphors against the purely objective and literal interpretation of metaphor by Donald Davidson. Davidson argues from an analytical “truth” seeking tradition which means he cannot accept metaphors having any other meaning besides their literal meaning which can be objectively validated. He allows no room for what he labels “special” meanings of metaphors, which I argue are the actual genuine meanings we receive from metaphors. When we interpret metaphors a large amount of content in one’s mind is produced which may or may not rely on others interpretation of the same metaphor, but through the understanding of Gadamer's concept of tradition a subjective yet objectively verified meaning of a metaphor is possible. Creative and unique perspectives are created through the use and interpretation of metaphor which Davidson restricts, therefore restricting the power and usage of metaphor. It is important that metaphor is not limited as it is for Davidson because we cannot think or provide meaning without an unrestricted understanding of metaphor.

02. Wes Siscoe – Northern Illinois University
***“Back to Minimalism: A Critique of Cheryl
Misak’s Peircean Conception of Truth”***

In “Deflating Truth: Pragmatism vs. Minimalism,” Cheryl Misak argues that Peircean

pragmatism can capture elements of truth that minimalism neglects. To this extent, Misak agrees with Crispin Wright’s thought that minimalism’s scant view of truth must be inflated. Yet if Misak wants to inflate the minimalist account of truth via Peircean pragmatism, she must contend with Wright’s criticisms of Peircean views of truth. In what follows, I will present two challenges Wright puts to the Peircean pragmatist along with Misak’s potential avenues of response. I will conclude that, if Misak is going to remain committed to the pragmatist maxim, the instability of Peirce’s view of truth will force her to turn back to minimalism, the very view which she sets out to reject.

03. Jordan Corner – University at Albany,
SUNY
***“Why is Bill like a Bulldozer?
A Defense of Kendall Walton's Account of
Metaphor as Prop-Oriented Make-Believe”***

Metaphors provide a prima facie puzzle. While they function as assertoric utterances, when taken literally they are false. Despite this, they are able to convey true information. In this paper I will give an overview of Kendall Walton's account of metaphor (2005). In addition, I will give an overview of the criticisms by Elizabeth Camp (2009) and Catherine Wearing (2012), as well as Walton's response to them (2014). I will conclude by supporting Walton against those criticisms.

04. Ezra Cook – Northwestern University
***“Intensional Operators are Unnecessary for a
Type-Driven Interpretation of Natural
Language, and it is Unclear Why Anyone
Should Want Them in the First Place”***

Does language represent the world? A pretheoretic answer to this question might initially seem quite obvious, but, as it turns out, this is a quite murky topic in both theoretical linguistics and philosophy. A more refined question might be: do the results of conceptual metaphysical investigation and linguistic

investigation coincide? Given some rather plausible assumptions, I would like to answer a conditional yes. However, it is the purpose of this paper to investigate how, and to what extent, this connection ought to come about.

05. **KEYNOTE** Alice Crary – New School for Social Research
“Feminism, Ethics and the Underrepresentation of Women in Philosophy”

This talk is about demands of feminist thought, and it is also about the notable underrepresentation of women in philosophy. I start by arguing that two prominent strands of feminist theorizing – strands associated, respectively, with poststructuralist thought and analytic moral philosophy – deprive us of resources for doing justice to feminist thinking insofar as it places certain demands on the imagination. I then claim that one place to find resources for a more satisfactory conception of feminist thinking is in Wittgenstein’s and Austin’s observations about the workings of language. My goal in turning to the writings of these figures is to show that their work equips us to arrive at an understanding of feminist thought that sheds helpful light on feminist praxis. One of my specific ambitions is to show that this new understanding equips us to take a step toward accounting for the underrepresentation of women in philosophy.

06. David Daise -- Pennsylvania State University
“Signifying Slurs: Sign Theory and the Origin and Nature of Slurs’ Offensiveness”

Slurs are derogatory expressions that target specific groups and are generally considered to elicit more offense than their neutral, coextensive counterparts. Most proposals argue that slurs are offensive due to offensive semantic content, derogatory likely or implied sentential roles, or social conventions surrounding their use. However, I argue that offensiveness is a feature of the interpretation of slurs and employ C.S. Peirce’s sign theory to explain the structure of

slurs’ meaning in relation to their offensiveness with a focus on the principal concerns that an account of slurs attempts to incorporate. My view does not reject these other proposals, rather conceives of them as potentially necessary justificatory frameworks for the interpretation of a slur as offensive contiguous with the socioeconomic or political realities of the target group.

07. Alejandro Tamez – Texas State University
“Wittgenstein and I”

Philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein focused his philosophical project on ridding philosophy of problems caused by mishandlings of language. Throughout his body of work, starting with the *Tractatus* (the only text he lived to publish) Wittgenstein is thought to have gone through stages of thought – primarily in reference to his thoughts regarding the structure of language. This observation is for the most part valid, but it is also narrowly tailored in such a way that ignores the fruitful similarities that are shared between the various texts. In this paper I bring to the fore Wittgenstein’s prevailing mysticism that ultimately keeps him from completely dismissing the subject or the philosophical I. The scope of this paper focuses on three texts: *The Tractatus*, *The Blue Book*, and *Philosophical Investigations*.

08. Dylan Daniel – Texas State University
“The Lexicultural Propagation of Concepts”

The term ‘lexicultural realm’ refers to the mix of various threads present within a linguistic feat, such as writing or speaking. A lexicultural realm is a kind of abstract, mental space within which these feats have extension and duration. Reading involves placing oneself into this kind of realm, and writing involves creating such a space. Recognition of the sense in which this process involves corporeality is key to understanding how language works to allow individuals to relate to each other and to the society within which they use language, as well as to the very

possibility of truth. When Einstein said he had seen further than other men because he was able to stand on the shoulders of giants, this is the phenomenon he was referring to.

09. Quoc Thai – University of Houston
“Against Semantic Externalism in the Brain-in-a-vat Thought Experiment”

In 1982, Putnam denies the possibility that we are mere brains-in-a-vat because he believes that the difference in referents entails a difference in meaning (semantic externalism). Many philosophers follow his foot step and argue using the same premise in the brain-in-a-vat problem such as Anthony Brueckner (1992) (2004), Crispin Wright (1994), and Bernhard Weiss (2000). With semantic externalism as a main premise of their argument, if semantic externalism does not go through, the argument fails. In this paper, I will argue the difference in referent does not entail a difference in meaning in a novel way, different than how semantic internalists commonly argue. With that, I will show that semantic externalism would fail to provide us with an anti-skeptic answer to the brain-in-a-vat problem.

10. **KEYNOTE** Kenneth Taylor – Stanford
“Topic TBD”
Abstract TBD

11. Elis Miller – University of New Mexico
“Forming a Coherent Picture: Wittgenstein’s proposition as a ruler”

One of the primary aims of the Tractatus was to use language to draw a coherent picture of the world, and describe this world in detail in the form of propositions written in order of logical importance. In his stipulations of how this world is to be demarcated, Wittgenstein tells us the elementary proposition is a logical picture that is like a scale applied to reality (2.16). While there are errors to the Tractarian picture, even admitted by Wittgenstein later in his life, the notion of a scale of reality, or a ruler applied to

reality, presents a theory that is pertinent to the tradition of philosophy of language. In presenting a theory of utility, the proposition as a ruler provides anti-cleavage to the oft-interpreted divide between early and late Wittgenstein. In this paper, I apply this pragmatic interpretation to decipher critical issues to the Tractatus and present a conclusion that incorporates the ruler theory of the Tractatus with Wittgenstein’s later works on meaning and use.

12. Kurt Blankschaen – University of Kansas
“Generic Consistency and Well-Being”

Theories of well-being require consistency. Consistency between values sometimes requires some non-evaluative middle term to show how one value belongs to a larger set. We typically interpret this membership universally and if the individual member turns out to actually conflict with the larger set, then we say there is an inconsistency. I will argue, however, that most of our judgments about well-being are generic and permit counterexamples or exceptions. Theories of well-being that use or allow generic judgments will have no reliable way to determine consistency in value judgments. Stating theories of well-being as generics, however, might offer an attractive alternative to theories that, as universal value judgments, have to bite the bullet on famous counter-examples. Avoiding these famous counter-examples by framing a theory in terms of generics might seem to come at the cost of consistency, but generics are idiosyncratic, not arbitrary, and so generic judgments are consistent relative to a language user and their moral theory.

13. Brian Thomas – San Diego State University
“Wittgenstein’s Private Language”

The aim of this work is to present two theories of a private language constructed from the refutation of three of Wittgenstein’s assumptions concerning Language. This research is divided into two parts: Part (I) consists in a refutation of three assumptions made by Wittgenstein regarding some aspect of Language. The

refutation and assumptions in the order as they are addressed: (A) How Wittgenstein fails to address all aspects of the function of Language, (B) How Wittgenstein's approach to Language makes a presupposition about the users of a given language, finally, (X) How language is used between individuals that is not consistent with the argument against private language. Part (II) constructs and presents two theories of a private language: (Δ) an argument for a weak private language, and (E) an argument for a strong private language. The argument for a weak private language is based, primarily, on what I will call qualia language. I argue qualia language is always used with a reference to the subject using the term, thus there cannot be an objective standard for the meaning of the term. Under the strong private language theory, I argue one attaches qualia language to an image, or has a qualitative state evoked from a particular image; this argument forms the basis for a strong private language. In the instance of the strong private language, there are two obstacles: the perception, and the qualia language or description of the perceptive image. This research is in progress and requires further refinement concerning the presented theories. However, what is given is simply a general direction for the complete product. The finished product will result in two complete theories for a private language.

14. **KEYNOTE** Michael Devitt – CUNY
“Testing Theories of Reference”

How should we test theories of reference? The accepted practice is to test them against the referential intuitions of philosophers. Machery *et al* (2004) wonder why it is appropriate to rely on the intuitions of philosophers rather than those of the folk. I wonder why it is appropriate to rely on referential intuitions at all. We should not go along with the common philosophical view that these intuitions are a priori. Philosophers might follow linguists in thinking that linguistic intuitions are “the voice” of our linguistic competence. But this view is false. Rather than

relying solely on the indirect evidence of intuitions, theories of reference need direct evidence from linguistic usage. The talk briefly considers the problems of doing this.

15. Erlantz Etxeberria – University of Colorado at Boulder
“On Self-Directed Irony”

In this paper I explore the nature of a particular kind of verbal irony—that which is targeted to the utterer of the sentence, and can be called self-directed (e.g. uttering ‘I’m the best cook in the world’ right after burning the food). Most pragmatic analyses of verbal irony from Grice to Clark and Gerrig take the conveyance of a criticism as a necessary element of it, but I argue that self-directed irony does not display such a feature, although it does involve some negative attitude. Furthermore, since the critical element is crucial to explain the motivations why people prefer to use irony instead of direct speech (e.g. soften criticism and face-saving), self-directed irony deserves a separate analysis. In the face of this counterexample I conclude that current theories should be revised to accommodate non-critical cases like that of self-directed irony.

16. Michael Fitzpatrick – Stanford University
“Form, Meaning, Facts”

Zoltán Szabó denies that natural language sentences have logical form. The main thrust of Szabó's attack is to argue that the distinctions between the three types of validities in natural language—factual, lexical and formal—are trivial, either because the set of formal validities is empty, or because both the set of formal and the set of lexical validities are empty. In this paper I explore both approaches, expanding on the first and developing a revised version of the second along Leibnizian lines to argue, in effect, that not only is the formal category vacuous, but either the factual or the lexical categories can be vacated. My conclusion is that these distinctions are motivated by extra-linguistic pragmatic interests such as efficiency and cognitive salience, and that only validities simpliciter are

intrinsic to natural languages—any further distinction is structure imposed for other reasons.

17. Corbin Casarez – Loyola University Chicago
“Resisting Criticisms of Communicative-Intention Theories of Meaning via Strawson’s Normative Account of Sentence-Meaning”

Many have criticized communicative-intention theories of meaning such as those proposed by Grice and Strawson as inadequate accounts, particularly of sentence-meaning. While intentions and contextual elements may factor into the meaning of a particular utterance, it seems incorrect to say that sentences have no meaning apart from these. In this paper, I will present four criticisms of communicative-intention analyses of meaning which do seem to have force against Grice's account(s). Then I will highlight an important difference in Strawson's account, namely, the normative feature of sentence-meaning, and argue that this feature protects his account from these criticisms. This normative feature suggests that Strawson, perhaps unwittingly, endorsed a procedural kind of meaning which can account for both the variability of utterance meaning and the stability of sentence-meaning—a combination that any truly satisfactory theory of meaning must explain.

18. Alex Kaiserman – University of Oxford, Princeton University (visiting)
“Normative Causation”

Ordinary causal judgements are sensitive to normative features of cases. Whether we judge one event to have caused another depends on whether the events in question were permissible or impermissible, normal or abnormal, typical or atypical. But although inconsistency of an analysis with ordinary judgements is often grounds for dismissal, there's a venerable tradition in the philosophical literature of remaining unmoved by this particular feature of our causal judgements. I think this is a mistake. The sensitivity of our causal judgements to norms is not a pragmatic phenomenon, nor is it

evidence of widespread error. It's data that deserves to be taken seriously as evidence for a theory of causation.

19. **KEYNOTE** John M. Fischer – U.C. Riverside
Libertarianism and the Problem of Metaphysical Flipflopping

I argue that libertarianism faces a daunting problem of metaphysical flipflopping, according to which one gives up a basic metaphysical principle on the basis of unrelated empirical data. Given the unacceptability of metaphysical flipflopping, libertarianism renders our moral responsibility unacceptably fragile (our personhood would "hang on a thread").