

4th SoCal Metaphysics Network Conference

March 15, 2025
9:00 AM - 5:00 PM
HG 1030

Organized by
M. Oreste Fiocco
Ari Koslow

Speakers and times:

9:15 AM - 10:15 AM Jamin Asay (Purdue)

10:25 AM - 11:25 AM Maegan Fairchild (Michigan)

11:35 AM - 12:35 PM John Bengson (UT-Austin)

Lunch break

2:00 PM - 3:00 PM Annina Loets (University of Wisconsin-Madison)

3:10 PM - 4:10 PM Daniel Korman (UC Santa Barbara)

4:20 PM - 5:20 PM Elanor Taylor (Johns Hopkins)

Titles & Abstracts:

[Jamin Asay](#)

"Metaphysical Skepticism About Truth: 2025 Edition"

Metaphysical skepticism about truth is as old as philosophy: the first book we know to be titled 'Truth' was written by a likely skeptic (Protagoras). The twentieth century saw its own fair share of metaphysical skepticism about truth, coming from unlikely bedfellows such as logical positivists and postmodernists. But what is the status of alethic skepticism today? In my current work, I am exploring two strains of alethic skepticism under the guise of what I call 'truth anxiety': the idea that truth is no longer playing a central role in public thought and discourse (and perhaps never did in the first place). One strain comes from a corner of the analytic philosophy of truth: the alethic nihilism offered by David Liggins and Will Gamester. They offer distinctively metaphysical arguments in defense of their view that there is no truth. The other strain comes from contemporary sociopolitical discourse, and centers around the idea that "we" no longer care about the truth, and perhaps no longer believe, on metaphysical grounds, that it exists. In my talk today I want to counter both views: I will argue against the alethic nihilists' metaphysical argument against truth, and then articulate and undermine the distinctly metaphysical theses that many have ascribed to our supposed era of "post-truth politics".

Maegan Fairchild

“Sentimental Kinds”

Some objects are special to us, and so we are invested in their distinctive quirks, imperfections, and histories. The characteristic scratches on your grandmother’s sewing table seem essential to it; you can’t simply sand and refinish the surface. You cherish a knitted hat from your sister precisely because it was so inexpertly constructed; it couldn’t have been made with neater stitches or with matching yarn. A child’s stuffed toy, now worn beyond recognition, can’t be restored to its original condition. This paper explores the idea that objects like these — heirlooms, handcrafts, and attachment objects — are “modally idiosyncratic” instances of familiar artifact kinds. On this picture, our interests and individual attachments partly shape the contours of everyday kinds, undermining (among other things!) otherwise tempting generalizations about the essential properties of ordinary objects.

John Bengson

“Explaining Constitution: Statues, Sets, and Successful Experiences”

When one entity constitutes another, what explains why this is so? I distinguish this question from various others (e.g., the question of iterated grounding) before outlining a general framework designed to answer any of its instances. Though stationed in metaphysics, the framework can be deployed to make progress in other areas of philosophy. For example, it sheds light on when (and why) causal facts do, or instead do not, explain constitution facts. The framework also facilitates the development of an explanatorily potent version of naïve realism in the philosophies of perception and intuition, one capable — I contend — of resolving Paul Benacerraf’s worry about intuitive knowledge in mathematics and other abstract domains.

Annina Loets

“Fission for Anti-Essentialists”

It is widely assumed in the literature on personal identity that people are essentially members of some kind, e.g., people are essentially persons or people are essentially human animals. I argue that two answers to fission puzzles which are usually set aside as unworkable look a lot more compelling once we drop such essentialist assumptions, and I argue that a lot can be learned from this exercise about what matters in survival.

Daniel Korman

“Moral Realism and the Argument from Alternate Histories”

Evolutionary moral debunking arguments often emphasize the inevitability of our moral beliefs: given how natural selection operates, we would have had the moral beliefs we do regardless of what the moral facts are. I will examine an alternative strategy, which emphasizes the contingency of our moral beliefs: there are things in our evolutionary history that could easily have gone differently and that would have resulted in substantially different moral beliefs. I consider various ways of moving from this observation to a skeptical upshot and find them wanting.

Elanor Taylor

“Explanatory Substantivity”