

David McElhoes

Curriculum Vitae

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School for Historical, Philosophical, and Religious Studies
Arizona State University
Tempe, AZ 85287

email: david.mcelhoes@asu.edu

phone: 240-501-0765

AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION: Metaphysics, Philosophy of Science (esp. Ecology)

AREAS OF COMPETENCE: Logic, Philosophy of Mind, Ancient Philosophy, Ethics

EMPLOYMENT

Instructor (Philosophy) Arizona State University – Tempe (August 2013 - present)
(Honors Faculty)

EDUCATION

Ph.D. (Philosophy) University of Maryland – College Park (May 2013)

Dissertation: “The Metaphysics of Multi-Level Explanation” (Defended: May 2012)

Committee: Mathias Frisch, Paul Pietroski, Michael Morreau, and Lindley Darden

M.A. (Philosophy) University of Manitoba (August 2006)

Thesis: “Systems of Parts and Persons: A Functionalist Account of Personal Identity”

Advisor: Timothy Schroeder (Ohio State University)

B.A. (Philosophy) University of Manitoba (May 2004)

B. Commerce, *Hons.* University of Manitoba (May 2003)
(Information Systems)

PAPERS

“Hierarchies for a Mereological Set Theory” (*under review*)

Abstract: It has been shown that set theory can be given a mereological interpretation: for David Lewis, a set is composed of its subsets; for Ben Caplan, Chris Tillman, and Pat Reeder, it is composed of its members. But neither interpretation successfully reduces set theory to

mereology. Lewis takes singleton sets as irreducible primitives; and Caplan, *et al.* introduce new non-mereological primitives: ‘hierarchy’, ‘level’, ‘lower than’, and ‘is in’. In this paper, I complete the reduction by showing that Caplan *et al.* can vindicate Lewis’ view that a set’s subsets are part of it, that all of the ZFC axioms can be derived from within a mereological framework, and that their hierarchical primitives can be eliminated by giving them a mereological analysis.

“The Problem of Fundamental Ontology” (*under review*)

Abstract: This paper raises a problem for the popular idea that the distinction between fundamentality and non-fundamentality is to be understood in terms of “by virtue of,” or “grounding.” The problem begins with a view, *Fundamental Fundamentality*, which consists in the following three claims: (1) truths exclusively about fundamental things are fundamental truths; (2) fundamental truths are exclusively about fundamental things; and (3) there are non-fundamental things (e.g., truths) – those things which are by virtue of other (e.g., fundamental) things. After showing that these three claims lead to a contradiction, given a popular principle of deduction – viz. C. S. Pierce’s principle of non-ampliativity – I investigate which of the three claims is to be rejected. The investigation reveals that rejecting either of the first two claims also requires rejecting the third. And so, given Pierce’s principle, non-fundamental things are not by virtue of fundamental things; the distinction must be carved in a different way.

“On The Impossibility of Omniscience and Other Epistemic Ideals” (*under review*)

Abstract: Omniscience, the alleged epistemic ideal, is classically construed as knowledge of every truth. In this paper, I show that this classic construal is logically impossible to satisfy. Turning the investigation to non-classical characterizations of omniscience – viz. John Abbruzzese’s (i.e., knowing a truth that entails all others), Richard Swinburne’s (i.e., knowing all of the knowable truths), and van Inwagen’s (i.e., infallibly believing all of the believable truths) – I show that they too are logically impossible to satisfy; each of them succumbs to a variant of the argument initially raised against classical omniscience. Finally, after arguing that those non-classical characterizations are the weakest that can be given while still deserving the label ‘omniscience’, I conclude that omniscience is logically incoherent. This leaves us with a vexing question: what, if not omniscience, is the epistemic ideal?

“The Paradox of Inevitable Ignorance” (*in preparation*)

Abstract: The expression, ‘for all you know’ is often used to characterize ignorance: you are ignorant, for example, of having received a package just in case, for all you know, you did not receive it. This paper casts doubt on this characterization using a certain kind of consistent (i.e., non-paradoxical) self-referential sentence. Specifically, I show how that sentence, when combined with the “for all you know” characterization, entails the paradoxical claim that no truth is known by anyone. Making matters worse, I extend this result in modal languages, thereby challenging the box-diamond duality – $\Box P \leftrightarrow \neg \Diamond \neg P$ – of which the “for all you know” characterization is an epistemic instance. To escape the paradox, I consider well-known solutions to paradoxes of self-reference, such as those of Alfred Tarski and Tyler Burge. After arguing that such solutions fail to provide a strong reason to reject the legitimacy of the offending self-referential sentence, I consider more radical solutions. Assessing them to be less plausible than Arnold Koslow’s modal logic, which invalidates the box-diamond duality, we are thus invited to conclude that, for all we know, the “for all you know” characterization of ignorance, and the modal principle it is an instance of, are not as indubitable as one might think.

“Troubling Times for Ontological Commitment” (*in preparation*)

Abstract: According to most metaphysicians, expressing an ontological commitment requires little more than existentially quantifying over that which you commit to. In this paper, I introduce a special problem for expressing ontological commitment: a problem that applies, specifically, to an ontological commitment to time. The problem is that, *pace* many metaphysicians, an ontological commitment to time cannot be expressed by quantifying over time(s). To solve this special problem, I borrow a proposal from Kit Fine; but, interestingly, only A-theorists about time are able to utilize it.

“Nested Hierarchies and the Structure of Ecology” (*in preparation*)

Abstract: The domain of ecology is traditionally conceived of as a hierarchy: atoms at the bottom level, the biosphere at the top, and everything else of interest to ecologists falling somewhere in between. A handful of authors have recently raised metaphysical objections to this traditional conception. In defense of tradition, I argue that these authors have misinterpreted the notion of a “nested” hierarchy as it is used within contemporary ecology, and that the standard understanding of nested hierarchies can be used to motivate a novel view of ecological organization which avoids their metaphysical objections.

PRESENTATIONS

“Omniscience is Impossible,” presented to the *Society for Exact Philosophy* (Calgary, AB, Summer 2017)

“All Times Are Troubled Times,” presented to the *International Association for the Philosophy of Time* (Winston-Salem, NC, Summer 2016)

“Nested Hierarchies and the Structure of Ecology,” presented at the *Congress for the Logic, Methodology and Philosophy of Science* (Helsinki, Finland, Summer 2015); also presented to the *American Philosophical Association, Central Division* (Chicago, IL, Spring 2016); also presented to the *Society for Exact Philosophy* (Miami, FL, Summer 2016)

“Hierarchies for a Mereological Set Theory,” presented as faculty keynote at the *ASU Graduate Student Conference* (Tempe, AZ, Winter 2015); also presented to the *Society for Exact Philosophy* (Hamilton, ON, Spring 2015).

“Counterpart Theory and Modal Discourse: A Reply to Meyer,” presented to the *American Philosophical Association, Eastern Division* (Atlanta, GA, Winter 2012)

“Difference-Making, Reduction, and Multi-Grade Causation,” presented to the *American Philosophical Association, Pacific Division* (Seattle, WA, Spring 2012)

“Difference-Making and Ontological Explanation,” presented to the *Congress for the Logic Methodology and Philosophy of Science* (Nancy, France, Summer 2011)

“No Time Like the Present,” presented to the *American Philosophical Association Pacific Division* (San Francisco, CA, Spring 2010)

“The Mysterious μ : Arguing Against Epistemic Vagueness,” paper presented to the *American Philosophical Association, Pacific Division* (Vancouver, BC, Spring 2009); also presented to the *Western Canadian Philosophical Association* (Edmonton, AB, Fall 2008)

“Ersatzism and Primitive Modality,” paper presented to the *Canadian Philosophical Association* (Toronto, ON, Spring 2006)

“Concepts and Counterparts,” paper presented to the *Western Canadian Philosophical Association* (Winnipeg, MB, Fall 2005)

AWARDS

Distinguished Teaching Assistant Award – Awarded by the *Center for Teaching Excellence, University of Maryland, College Park* (2013)

Arts and Humanities Graduate Student Travel Grant – Awarded by the *University of Maryland, College Park* (2012); awarded a second time (2013)

International Conference Student Support Award – Awarded by the *University of Maryland, College Park* (2011)

Goldhaber Travel Award – Awarded by the *University of Maryland, College Park* (2009); awarded a second time (2013)

Brian Hull Prize for Most Outstanding First-Year Graduate Student (shared) – Awarded by the *Department of Philosophy, University of Maryland, College Park* (2007)

SSHRC Doctoral Fellowship – Awarded by the *Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada* (2006-2010)

University of Maryland Graduate Fellowship – Awarded by the *Department of Philosophy, University of Maryland, College Park* (2006)

Alumni Association Travel Award – Awarded by the *University of Manitoba Alumni Association* (2006)

UMGF Graduate Fellowship – Awarded by the *Department of Graduate Studies, University of Manitoba* (2005)

Department of Philosophy Graduate Scholarship – Awarded by the *Department of Graduate Studies, University of Manitoba* (2004)

SERVICE

Referee for the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* (2015)

Referee for PHLING: University of Maryland graduate conference in linguistics and philosophy (2012)

TEACHING

Arizona State University:

Metametaphysics	(400-level; online)
The Philosophy of Time	(400-level; online)
Philosophy of Science	(300-level; face-to-face and online)
Philosophy of Mind	(300-level; online)
Symbolic Logic	(300-level; face-to-face and online)
Argument and Exposition	(300-level; face-to-face)
Introduction to Ethics	(100-level; face-to-face)
Principles of Sound Reasoning	(100-level; face-to-face)
Introduction to Philosophy	(100-level; face-to-face)

University of Maryland:

The Philosophy of Time-Travel	(400-level; online)
The Philosophy of Plato	(400-level; face-to-face and online)
Metaphysics of Mind	(400-level; online)
Ancient Philosophy	(300-level; face-to-face)
Introduction to Logic	(100-level; face-to-face and online)
Introduction to Philosophy	(100-level; face-to face and online)

University of Manitoba:

Environmental Ethics	(200-level; face-to-face)
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REFERENCES

Mathias Frisch, Professor
 Leibniz Universität, Hannover
 Phone: +49 (0) 511 762 – 5151 Email: mathias.frisch@philos.uni-hannover.de

Paul Pietroski, Professor
 Rutgers University, New Brunswick
 Phone: Email: paul.pietroski@rutgers.edu

Michael Morreau, Professor
 The Arctic University of Norway
 Phone: 011 47 7764 5230 Email: michael.morreau@uit.no

Bernard Kobes, Associate Professor
 Arizona State University, Tempe
 Phone: 480-965-4149 Email: kobes@asu.edu

Carla Merino-Rajme, Assistant Professor
 University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
 Phone: 919-962-0176 Email: cmerino@email.unc.edu