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§1

EDITORIAL

There's a new guy in town, or I should say a new player in the field of mathematical philosophy: the [Munich Center for Mathematical Philosophy](#), aka MCMP. You probably heard rumors about it, saw some announcements for positions being sent around, or met some of its concrete instantiations (viz. its new members). Now it's time for a proper introduction.

The MCMP is first and foremost under the auspices of Hannes Leitgeb. His Alexander von Humboldt Professorship Grant created the Center. It was thus natural to give him the first words, resulting in the short interview below. The members of the MCMP's initial team

also kindly accepted to fill in a short questionnaire to introduce themselves. This, overall, gives quite a good impression of the exciting social and scientific environment that is now being created in Munich.

Looking forward to seeing you there!

[OLIVIER ROY](#)

Munich Center for Mathematical Philosophy

§2

FEATURES

66 Interview with the Munich Center for Mathematical Philosophy

Thanks to Barbara Pöhlmann for her help. For more information about the MCMP, including announcements of positions currently open at the Center, please have a look at the [website](#).

INTERVIEW WITH [HANNES LEITGEB](#)

Olivier Roy: Thanks so much for giving us this interview for *The Reasoner*. Let us start with basic facts: what is the Munich Center of Mathematical Philosophy?

Hannes Leitgeb: It is a new Center based at LMU Munich which is funded primarily by the German Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and which is concerned with applications of logical and mathematical methods in philosophy. Obviously it is not in any sense

about reducing philosophy to mathematics, just as it is not the case that physics gets reduced to mathematics if mathematical methods are applied in physics. It is just that, when you try to address philosophical questions and problems, sometimes it is very useful to involve logical and mathematical methods in order to solve the problems, or just to understand more properly what the problems are all about, to build, in the ideal case, a philosophical theory in which philosophical questions get answered. So in the Center we want to do research in philosophy in which we use methods that get used in sciences, namely mathematical methods.



OR: Could you describe the Center in terms of its people, orientation, field of research?

HL: I sort of come from a tradition that is very much related to logical empiricism, to the Vienna Circle, and of course you find this idea of applying especially logic, and to a lesser extent also mathematics, to philosophy already there. What is distinctive of the Center in Munich—and this is a difference compared to the Vienna Circle—is that none of traditional philosophical questions are being dismissed. Rather, in the Center, in principle we are interested in all classical questions of philosophy, in whatever area of philosophy, but these questions are being addressed using logical and mathematical methods. Accordingly, in the Center—already in the starting team that will be complete from April 2011—we cover more or less all areas of philosophy. So there are people here who actually do philosophical logic, of course, like epistemic logic, dynamic epistemic logic, conditional logic, deontic logic, and so on. We have people doing philosophy of mathematics, such as structuralism or nominalism about maths. But over and above these areas in which formal methods are naturally being applied or studied, we have fellows doing epistemology, that is then formal epistemology, and philosophy of science: so there are members of the Center who come from the Bayesian tradition and who thus apply probabilistic methods within their theories of confirmation or causality, but we also have people here who take up the more deductive or semantic conceptions of scientific theories and who try to develop them using formal means. Some members of the Center do philosophy of language with the help of logical, mathematical, and even experimental means. For example, some are interested in logical inferentialism, where the meaning of logic constants is constituted by logical rules, others analyze the acceptability of conditionals in

terms of conditional probabilities. We have fellows in the Center doing formal theories of truth and semantic paradoxes, obviously, but there are also people who are working, amongst others, on formal aesthetics—e.g., recently there has been a talk given by Norbert Gratzl on an ontological theory for aesthetic objects for which abstraction principles which are formulated in the language of second order logic play a crucial role. So this pretty much shows that there is no particular philosophical area which we think can't be an area in which formal methods are used. But that doesn't mean that at this point of time we know for each and every philosophical problem how to use mathematical methods in order to solve that problem. And of course none of us thinks that logical and mathematical methods necessarily exhaust our philosophical methodology.

OR: This sounds like a very broad array of topics. What are your main goals and/or aims for the Center?

HL: First of all, the Center will simply host research. In particular, we are funding postdoctoral and doctoral fellows. The doctoral fellowships should be advertised very soon, and they are to be taken up by the successful applicants by September 2011. We have already hired six postdoctoral fellows, and further postdoctoral fellows are on their way who are supported by sources other than the Center itself. All of these fellows are based in the Center, they have their rooms and research facilities, they join all the activities, and they do research. We also have a visiting fellowship scheme that's going to start from April, so e.g. Steve Awodey from Carnegie Mellon, Branden Fitelson from Rutgers, Ed Zalta from Stanford, and other people will be visiting the Center, for a couple of weeks to a couple of months, and obviously there will be lectures held by the visitors, workshops about their work, and they will collaborate with people in the Center. We will have a weekly colloquium in mathematical philosophy with speakers from elsewhere, an internal work-in-progress seminar, reading groups, tutorials given by fellows for fellows, and the like. And then we are going to host a lot of workshops and larger conferences, including the Formal Epistemology Workshop next year and the Formal Ethics Workshop the year after. In September of this year there will also be the big conference of the German Society for Philosophy and within that big conference we will have a two-day workshop on mathematical philosophy, which will we also use to introduce the Center to German philosophers.

OR: You mentioned the relation of the Center with the Vienna Circle, but how about more contemporary research centers? In recent years quite a few new research groups have been created that use mathematical methods to address philosophical problems. How does the Munich Center relate to them?

HL: Generally speaking, I don't think formal or mathematical philosophy is a new thing at all. A long

time before the Vienna Circle, Aristotle invented logic, Leibniz was doing formal metaphysics, and so on. The Vienna Circle carried on with that tradition but using the new formal methods at the time, that is, mathematical logic. And now what young philosophers are currently fascinated by is doing philosophical work again by using formal methods that are even more recent to philosophy. So, e.g., there are new or relatively new formal methods like nonmonotonic reasoning, dynamic epistemic logic, probability theory, and game theory, and many young philosophers these days are attracted by them. Accordingly, there are centers dealing with aspects of this way of doing philosophy elsewhere, and obviously we want to relate to all of them. So in the U.S. there is the wonderful Formal Epistemology Workshop series, and I already said that we are getting the workshop here next year, and Branden Fitelson, who is one of its two originators, will be one of our visiting fellows. In the UK there are centers like ours, too: One of the hotspots of formal philosophy actually is Bristol, where I'm coming from, and there will be annual Bristol-Munich workshops in the future, the first one taking place in September in Munich. The Netherlands is very strong in that area, e.g., Amsterdam and Groningen, and both of them will be cooperation partners and with both of them we are planning to have joint events. There will definitely be joint activities with the excellent centers in Tilburg and Konstanz. The new Formal Epistemology Center at Carnegie Mellon is already one of our cooperation partners: I'll give two talks there in March, and then they will come over to Munich in the future and give talks here. We want to do something like that also with Stanford and with an excellent group of young logicians and philosophers in Paris including Paul Egré, Denis Bonnay and Brian Hill, and so on. If there is any difference at all between our Center and these cooperation partners it is that many of them are devoted to the application of mathematical methods in one particular area of philosophy, typically, epistemology. The Center here in Munich is slightly larger in its scope and maybe also in personnel and resources.

OR: A more general question. How do you see the relation between this formal work in philosophy and more traditional, non-formal approaches?

HL: I don't really believe in a substantial division into something like mainstream philosophy on the one hand and formal or mathematical philosophy on the other. Rather I would say that there are the traditional philosophical questions: "What is truth?", "What kinds of objects are there?", "What is knowledge?", "How do we know about these objects?", "What should we do?", and so on. And then philosophers address these questions by putting forward theses and arguments for these theses. And, if it is good philosophy, they try to make the theses clear, and they take care that the arguments are logically valid or maybe strong in some weaker sense. The only

thing that I'm claiming, and I think this is pretty uncontroversial, is that sometimes logical and mathematical methods can help to clarify these—that's what in the tradition is called logical analysis, and there is no doubt that this is sometimes of big help—and secondly sometimes there might be arguments from philosophical assumptions to philosophical conclusions which get so complex that you actually need mathematics to bridge the gap between the premises and the conclusions. As far as that part is concerned, traditionally, philosophers have put forward arguments for which it was pretty easy to see that the premises logically entail, or inductively support, the conclusion. The only thing we are changing is that we want to build arguments with the help of mathematics where it is in fact the case that the conclusion is contained implicitly in the premises, but where it is not so easy to see that this is so. The role of logical and mathematical methods in philosophy will then very much be like the role of mathematical methods in the sciences.

OR: Many thanks. We'll keep an eye on the Center!

HL: Please do. Thanks very much.

FIVE QUESTIONS TO THE CENTER'S INITIAL TEAM

JEFFREY KETLAND

1. Who you are:

Dr Jeffrey Ketland (PhD from LSE (1999): logic, applicability of mathematics, truth). Assistant Professor in Mathematical Philosophy; Associate Director of the Munich Center for Mathematical Philosophy (and Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at Edinburgh).



2. Motivations:

First, the research areas associated with the Munich Center overlap considerably with my own research interests. Second, the methodological approach of the Director of the Center, Hannes Leitgeb, is one that I have long shared: formulate philosophical problems as *precisely* as possible and then utilize relevant *logical and mathematical methods* in attempting to understand these problems. Third, the academic staff already present in the Center are world-class researchers in the fields of logic, foundations of mathematics, formal epistemology, etc. It is therefore a wonderful opportunity to work in Munich with such a talented group of researchers.

3. Current research:

I am currently working on the nominalization of scientific theories; the “speed-up” of more powerful theories over weaker ones; some topics connected to space and time (“Leibniz equivalence” of spacetime models; Leibnizian “shift arguments”); the concepts of identity and indiscernibility. I have some work on some technical issues related to expressivism in meta-ethics (for example, using a 3-valued logic for the semantics). I am also working on two monographs, one on theories of truth and another on mathematical methods in philosophy.

4. Scientific network:

I interact with many philosophers and logicians working in logic, the foundations of mathematics, philosophy of language and philosophy of science, and have organised a conference (in 2006, on the work of Kurt Gödel) and workshop (in 2009, on realism in mathematics, modality and morality) in some of these areas. I’ve written a short paper with Panu Raatikainen, discussing arguments given by Lucas and Redhead about Gödel’s theorems. The Center itself is now the heart of a network of researchers in the relevant areas and I look forward to working with the other members of the Center.

5. Future:

Aside from the specific topics mentioned above, my medium-term research aim is to complete a single piece of work bringing together the main body of mathematical methods in philosophy (basic set theory, arithmetic, abstract algebra, probability theory, geometry, model theory, non-classical logic, reduction methods, nominalization, etc.).

VINCENZO CRUPI

1. Who you are:

Vincenzo Crupi, PhD Philosophy, University of Turin, 2004 MSc Philosophy and History of Science, LSE, 2002. Function at the Center: Postdoctoral Fellow.



2. Motivations:

MCMP is the perfect place to pursue the research interests in which I’ve been engaged recently: formal analyses of reasoning (especially probabilistic and inductive inference) in connection with empirical investigation of human rationality and its limitations.

3. Current research:

Formal explication of epistemological concepts within the Bayesian framework (especially confirmation) and its potential as a source of theorizing in the psychology of reasoning. I also cherish an interest in reasoning and decision-making in medicine.

4. Scientific Network:

Katya Tentori, experimental psychology, University of Trento, Roberto Festa, philosophy of science, University of Trieste. In the Center: The closest connection is probably with Niki (Pfeifer)’s research interests.

5. Future:

The underlying general issue of my ongoing projects is human rationality, with a particular interest in the relationships between formal theories of reasoning and the empirical study of human cognition. In the near future, I plan to exploit this approach in the analysis of information search behavior. In essence, how people should (and how they do) selectively look for evidence in view of future inference and action.

PAUL DICKEN

1. Who you are:

Paul Dicken, PhD in History and Philosophy of Science (2004–2007), from the Department of History and Philosophy of Science, University of Cambridge, UK. I am currently a Junior Research Fellow in Philosophy at Churchill College, University of Cambridge, and a Visiting Fellow (2010–2011) at the Center.



2. Motivations:

Beginning a new project on logical positivism/logical empiricism, with a particular interest in Ernst Mach (hence Munich, for the Deutsches Museum), and Carnap (hence Professor Leitgeb). Also interested in the application of new methods in formal philosophy with respect to these areas (hence the Center).

3. Current research:

I am currently working on questions of scientific ontology in the light of the logical structure of scientific theories—questions concerning the reduction, definition and elimination of certain fragments of our scientific vocabulary. I am attempting to resurrect the view that our scientific theories do not make propositional claims about the external world at all, and how this relates to the contemporary scientific realism debate. I also have some broader interests in the application of logical methods to traditional problems in the philosophy of science, and have been working on various non-classical (relevant and/or paraconsistent) logics of confirmation.

4. Scientific Network:

I have already worked with Florian Steinberger at Cambridge, and will continue to do so in Munich. I also collaborate with Nick Tosh (NUI Galway) and Axel Gelfert (National University of Singapore). I completed a large portion of my recent book in Singapore.

5. Future:

What are the absolutely minimum ontological and epistemology commitments of our most successful scientific practices? What does this show us about our place in nature?

MARTIN FISCHER

1. Who you are:

Martin Fischer, PhD in Philosophy, Munich 2007; Function at the Center: Visiting Fellow.

2. Motivations:

The excellent research conditions and the new possibilities of collaboration.

3. Current research:

At the moment I am working on a philosophical motivation for weak axiomatic theories of truth.

4. Scientific Network:

Leon Horsten; Volker Halbach; Johannes Stern. Within the Center, I would like to work with Hannes Leitgeb, Jeffrey Ketland, Julien Murzi, Ole Hjortland.

5. Future:

The main theme of research will be the interaction of modalities treated as predicates. Although syntactical treatments of modalities are attractive because of its greater generality than the mainstream approach there are only few proposals. I want to focus on the question of interaction of two or more modalities exemplified by the knowability principle. The phenomenon of interaction has not been investigated systematically for the syntactical approach. A special focus will be on new paradoxes created by the interaction and possible solutions for them.

NORBERT GRATZL

1. Who you are:

Norbert Gratzl. PhD.: Salzburg, 2002, Proof-theory of Free Logic. Function at the Center: Postdoctoral Fellow.

2. Motivations:

The MCMP is a great opportunity to carry out logical investigations in philosophy. The working environment is simply great: colleagues are highly trained in formal



techniques and very open minded. ... last but not least: Munich is quite a fine city.

3. Current research:

At the moment I do research on definite and indefinite descriptions.

4. Future:

I recently started working on the use of Hilbert's epsilon-calculus in analyzing theoretical terms; thereby I try to answer the question of whether a logical reconstruction of theoretical terms—as suggested by Carnap—allows for a structuralist interpretation of scientific theories. Furthermore, I am quite interested in the ontology of aesthetic objects.



OLE THOMASSEN HJORTLAND

1. Who you are:

Ole Thomassen Hjortland, PhD in Philosophy, Arché Research Centre, University of St Andrews, 2009. Function at the Center: Postdoctoral Research Fellow.

2. Motivations:

I was attracted by the idea of a research center dedicated to mathematical methods in philosophy. Even better, the Munich center will offer a great framework for collaborative work between researchers with interests in formal methods, both locally and with the international community.

3. Current research:

I am currently working on the semantic paradoxes, and in particular solutions involving substructural logics. I'll give a paper on the topic at the 5th Foundations of Logical Consequence workshop in St Andrews in early April. I'm also editing a volume on logical consequence with Colin Caret (Arché/St Andrews).

4. Scientific Network:

Up until now my closest collaborators have been my colleagues in my old research fellowship in the University of St Andrews. I've worked closely with Stephen Read and Colin Caret over the last few years. In Munich I already have a very good friend and colleague in my co-author Julien Murzi, but I hope to get the chance to work with many others in the near future.

5. Future:

I'm hoping to branch out to work more with formal epistemology, and especially connections to logical



consequence. I've also started working on the connection between philosophy of logic and experimental data from the psychology of reasoning. In Munich I'll have the chance to learn from people with lots of experience from both fields.

CHRISTOPHER MENZEL

1. Who you are:

Christopher Menzel. PhD. 1984, University of Notre Dame, Philosophy (dissertation on the philosophy of set theory). Function at the Center: Visiting Fellow.



2. Motivations:

I will be on sabbatical leave from Texas A&M University for the 2011-12 academic year, so I began seeking a stimulating research environment set in an enjoyable location—preferably in Germany, as my wife and I have been spending large portions of our summers there in recent years. I learned of the Center through Edward Zalta, who had been collaborating with Prof Leitgeb. Given the Center's mission and location at LMU, I could hardly have designed a more ideal setting!

3. Current research:

At the moment I am working on a paper on mathematical structuralism and another on an extension of first-order logic with variably polyadic predicates, but the main focus of my work is the logic and metaphysics of modality, particularly the implications of a strong form of actualism on the semantics of quantified modal logic.

4. Scientific Network:

I have just completed a paper with Dr Edward Zalta of Stanford University and I am working on the logic paper noted above with Dr Fabian Neuhaus (PhD Humboldt Universität) of the National Institutes for Standards and Technology. My interests overlap with those of both Prof Leitgeb and Prof Jeffrey Ketland at the Center, but at the moment I am simply anticipating the opportunity to meet all of the researchers there and learn about the work they are doing.

JULIEN MURZI

1. Who you are

Julien Murzi, First PhD in Philosophy, University of Rome "La Sapienza"; second PhD in Philosophy, University of Sheffield. The topic of my first PhD thesis was Fitch's Paradox of Knowability; the second thesis was on logical revision and the inferentialist approach

to logic. Function at the Center: Post-doctoral Research Fellow.

2. Motivations:

MCMP, and the department at LMU, offer a wonderful research environment. Here in Munich I have the opportunity to work closely with outstanding researchers—both junior and senior—whose interests are very close to mine. I also have the chance to learn more about a host of issues and methodologies, and thus widen my research interests. I should also mention that Munich is a wonderful city, and that the Alps are very close.



3. Current research:

I am currently working on three main topics: (i) semantic paradoxes, in particular validity paradoxes, (ii) the inferentialist approach to logic, and (iii) some topics on the realism/anti-realism debate (e.g. whether Dummett's manifestability requirement is, or can be made, consistent with the existence of blindspots for knowability). I am convinced that validity paradoxes effectively restrict the range of admissible revisionary approaches to semantic paradox. In fact, they tell us that, if paradoxes are to be solved via logical revision, one should give up, or restrict, some of the *structural rules* of the logic. Revising the logic of *connectives* such as negation and the conditional doesn't get to the heart of the matter: paradoxes still loom. I also think that validity paradoxes can teach us a great deal about the nature of validity; in particular, they suggest that validity is an indefinitely extensible notion, or at least so I wish to argue in my future work. Concerning the inferentialist approach to logic, I am currently turning into papers some parts of my thesis. Among other things, I am working on a harmonious formalization of full classical logic—one that doesn't resort to proof-theoretic 'tricks', such as multiple conclusions or rules for denying complex statements. As I show, the formalization is not only harmonious, but also separable, i.e. the inferential role of any single logical operator is fully determined by its introduction and elimination rules. If there are reasons to question the validity of some classical rules, we should not expect these reasons to be proof-theoretic, *pace* authors such as Dummett, Prawitz and Tennant.

4. Scientific Network:

I am currently working on joint projects with JC Beall (University of Connecticut) and with my inferentialist colleagues here in Munich, Ole Hjortland and Florian Steinberger. I am also editing (and contributing to) a

volume on logical consequence, together with Massimiliano Carrara (University of Padova). Here in Munich I would also be very happy to work with the truth-theorists of our research group, especially Hannes (Leitgeb), Jeff (Ketland) and Martin (Fischer).

5. Future:

I would like to work on absolute generality (or lack thereof)—so-called generality relativism, I think, is the price to pay (if it is a price at all!) for keeping classical logic and solving the semantic paradoxes without typing our language. In time, I would love to start doing research on Bayesianism, rationality, and causality.

NIKI PFEIFER

1. Who you are:

I received my PhD in psychology from the University of Salzburg in 2006. Function at the Center: Postdoctoral Fellow.

2. Motivations:

I decided to take a position at the Center because it gives me the opportunity to ideally combine my philosophical and psychological research on reasoning, the rich intellectual environment, and full intellectual freedom. Last but not least, my wife—who is an outstanding intellectual—accepted a job offer by the Technical University of Munich.

3. Current research:

Currently, I am working on conditionals, Aristotle's thesis, foundations of experimental philosophy, argumentation under uncertainty, and on probability semantics of Aristotelian syllogisms.

4. Scientific Network:

My most recent collaborations include one with Igor Douven on conditionals and experimental philosophy, and another one with Angelo Gilio and Giuseppe Sanfilippo on probability semantics of Aristotelian syllogisms. Hannes Leitgeb and I are planning to collaborate on counterfactual conditionals. Moreover, I am looking forward to fruitful collaborations with other members of the Center.

5. Future:

The main goal of my research in the coming years will be the further development of a theory of reasoning under uncertainty. The construction of the theory will be guided by various rationality norms proposed in philosophy, AI and psychology. I will empirically



evaluate it by a series of psychological experiments.

ROLAND POELLINGER

I am in the final phase of writing my PhD thesis in logic/formal epistemology right now—my topic: causal modelling between determinism and probabilism, based on frame-relative and subjective principles of knowledge organization within Bayes net methods. Future work will centre around cognitive foundations of model evocation/revision and formal representations thereof. Currently, I am assistant at the LMU chair for logic and philosophy of language, and have as such been teaching at the institute (formerly: chair for philosophy, logic, and philosophy of science) since 2009, focusing on formal logic, computability, and algorithmic aspects of classical logic.



OLIVIER ROY

1. Who you are:

Olivier Roy, PhD (2008) at the Institute for Logic, Language and Computation in Amsterdam. For my thesis I worked on the interplay between philosophy of action, and especially theories of intentions, philosophical logic and game theory. At the center I am assistant professor in logic and philosophy of language.

2. Motivations:

Since my master degree in Québec, I somehow kept ending up using formal methods to work on philosophical questions: first in Amsterdam and then during the three years I spent as postdoc in Groningen (NL). The MCMP just seemed like the place to be for a guy like me. Plus the thought of being part of a brand new project, helping to set up things, was very attractive. Finally, this seemed like a great opportunity to broaden my horizon on what formal philosophy is, and can be. When I saw at the initial team of the MCMP, this impression surely got confirmed!

3. Current research:

In the last years I got more and more interested in



so-called epistemic game theory—from my point of view a natural meeting point between game theory, logic, philosophy of action, meta-ethics and epistemology. I’m working on a monograph with Eric Pacuit (TiLPS, Tilburg, NL) on the topic. Not independently of that, I also started to look at theories of public deliberation, both from a formal and philosophical—even continental!—perspective.

4. Scientific Network:

Eric Pacuit has been my main *companion d’armes* in the last years. Recent collaborators also include Johan van Benthem, Cédric Dégrement, Patrick Girard, Vincent Hendricks, Fenrong Liu and Mathieu Marion. Obvious potential collaborators at and around the MCMP: Hannes, Norbert, Martin (Rechenauer), Niki, Julien and Roman. But having met most of the initial team members already, I’m quite sure that interesting, and unexpected combinations will arise!

5. Future:

I think social interaction opens genuinely new philosophical perspectives, especially for action theory and epistemology, and that a lot of progress can be made there by using formal tools. That’s definitely the line I want to keep exploring in the coming years. But, again, I’m quite convinced that the MCMP will be a hotbed for new, unorthodox directions for formal philosophy, and I’m very willing to jump in!

FLORIAN STEINBERGER

1. Who you are:

Florian Steinberger, University in 2009 in philosophy. Assistant professor in logic and philosophy of language.

PhD. Cambridge



2. Motivations:

When I heard that Hannes would be taking up a chair in Munich and setting up a research center around him, I knew he would create something truly terrific. For me going to Munich presented a unique opportunity to be part of a vibrant research community of very gifted people with similar research interests, and to contribute (however modestly) to shaping the Center from the ground on up—a very enticing prospect indeed!

3. Current research:

I am currently working on various projects related to logical inferentialism, including a monograph (with Julien Murzi) and an edited volume (with Neil Tennant). I am also wrestling with a number of different foundational questions concerning the normativity and the

metaphysics of logic. Recently I have also begun working on a number of problems in the philosophy of language. In particular, I am trying to formulate an account of the speech act of supposition.

4. Scientific Network:

Closest research collaborators nowadays: Julien Murzi and Neil Tennant. Within the Center: I am already collaborating with Julien Murzi, but I am sure that further opportunities for fruitful collaboration will present themselves. Can’t wait to get there (in April 2011)!

5. Future:

I aim to pursue my work on foundational issues in the philosophy of logic. Also, I plan to intensify my engagement with the philosophy of language. I hope especially to contribute to current debates on the nature of propositions, the semantics/pragmatics distinction and philosophical implications of generative grammar.

Liars are fairly true

Divine Liar arguments aim to show that there’s no omniscient being—that no one knows all that’s true—in the following way. Suppose I say “No omniscient being knows that what I’m now saying is true.” If (as I believe) no one is omniscient, then no omniscient being exists, to know anything. So in that case, what I said was true. What I said was therefore an assertion, whether it was true or not. And if it wasn’t true—if it’s not the case that no omniscient being knows that what I said was true—then some omniscient being knows that what I said was true, despite it not being true, which is impossible (knowledge being of truths). So I asserted a truth; and so either that was a truth that some omniscient being doesn’t know, which is also impossible, or else there’s no such being.

However, resolutions of the Liar Paradox might show that such arguments are invalid, e.g. according to Daniel J. Hill (2007: *The Divine Liar Resurfaces*, *The Reasoner* 1(5), 11–12) and my earlier article (2008: *Liars, Divine Liars and Semantics*, *The Reasoner* 2(12), 4–5). So, suppose I say “What I’m now saying isn’t true.” If what I said was true then, as I said, what I said wasn’t true. Does it follow that what I said wasn’t true? The paradox is that if so, then since that’s what I seem to have said, I seem to have said something true. The resolution defended earlier by me (2008) takes my utterance to have been meaningless, so that I didn’t really say anything. But we may then wonder how it was that it seemed so clear what my utterance would have meant had it been true; and my Divine Liar utterance was even more obviously meaningful. Another popular resolution would regard my Liar utterance as equivocal, with the word ‘true’ naming many different predicates in Hill’s (2007) Tarskian hierarchy. But formal languages can only be defined via natural language; and