

# CALL FOR PAPERS

Metaphysical Society of America

69<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting

Atlanta, GA March 22-25, 2018

## **The Metaphysics of Agency: Intention, Purpose and Action**

Puzzles about agency and action are found in all philosophical schools and traditions, including Eastern. The reflection on agency brings forward concepts of the production, purpose, and explanation of action, wherein human action is not the sole focus. What are the ontological credentials of agency and action (a problem since Aristotle)? Is there an agent “behind” every action? Is presupposing an agent for every action an error foisted on us by “the metaphysics of language...which sees everywhere deed and doer” (Nietzsche)? In what ways are putative agents causal? Is action just a bodily event caused by other such events? Can one say that bodies (or events) act? Can nonhuman animals and robots act? Limiting the focus to the human, is human action imbued with intentionality? If so, what are the intentions and purposes of human agents? Recent philosophy has a lively discussion of mental causation. How does mind or thought cause action? A leading line of recent inquiry proposes that human action involves a response to the “space of reasons” and is inexplicable in natural-scientific or nomological terms (McDowell, et al.). This reflection suggests ways of addressing the classic problems of freedom, determinism, and compatibilism, wherein ontological riddles still abound. A prominent trend in contemporary Hegelian thought argues that the ontological-causal questions are superseded by viewing human action in terms of social practices of norm-giving. This approach stresses the roles of language, culture and institutions in constituting action, as well as the narrative character of action. Related investigations are found in the later Wittgenstein, pragmatist and hermeneutical-critical philosophy (“communicative action”), et al. Can institutions and communities act, and, if so, how do they? How are agency and action regarded from the standpoint of recent “speculative realism”? Lastly (but only for this call for papers) how does the human as active relate to the human as productive-poetic, as contemplative-theoretical...? Proposals for papers on these and kindred questions are welcomed, but other topics of metaphysics will also be considered.

500-word abstracts should be submitted electronically by September 1, 2017 to: Richard Velkley, Department of Philosophy, Tulane University at: [rvelkley@tulane.edu](mailto:rvelkley@tulane.edu)

Those whose abstracts are chosen by the Program Committee should submit completed papers by January 15, 2018 to allow review by commentators and publication of the program. Further information on the conference will become available at: [www.metaphysicalsociety.org](http://www.metaphysicalsociety.org)

***Aristotle Prize:*** Papers submitted by persons who have not yet earned a PhD or who have received the PhD within five years of the submission date will be considered for the Aristotle Prize, if the Program Committee is made aware of their eligibility. The prize carries a cash award of \$500, inclusion in the program, and assistance with costs associated with attending the meeting. Please encourage graduate students and junior colleagues to consider entering the competition. Full papers must be submitted for the Aristotle Prize by **September 1, 2017**.

***Travel Grants:*** Thanks to the generous support of members of the Metaphysical Society and a grant from the Hocking-Cabot Fund for Systematic Philosophy, we are pleased to offer travel grants to graduate students whose papers are selected for the program for our annual meeting. More information and an application can be found on the Society's website.