

The Metaphysical Society of America

Constituent of the American Council of Learned Societies
www.metaphysicalsociety.org

2016 Call to Meeting and Request for Abstracts

“Thinking with the Pre-Socratics: History, Myth, and Metaphysics”

The 67th Annual Meeting of the MSA will be held in Annapolis, Maryland from March 17-20, 2016 (revised date). President-elect George Lucas has proposed the theme: “Thinking with the Pre-Socratics: History, Myth, and Metaphysics.” One-page title and abstract prepared for blind review should be **submitted by 1 September 2015** to: george.r.lucas.jr@gmail.com.

The Pre-Socratics invite perennial fascination on many levels. Historically, they mark the turn in Western culture from *mythos* to *logos*, inaugurating the search for rational, causal explanations of natural objects and events, grounded in the physical ordering (*physis*) of the cosmos itself, rather than in the supernatural, inscrutable whims of the gods. While their musings are largely captured in the aphoristic form of earlier “wisdom literature” of sages, the aphorisms of the Pre-socratics, by contrast, mark the (mythical) origins in philosophy of what will later emerge as the natural sciences.

Those same attempts at rational, philosophical explanations of physical objects and events, however, invoke fundamental or grounding principles that themselves lie beyond the bounds of the finite natural order, and are often framed in terms of *speculative hypotheses* about the ultimate ground of Being itself. These rival *speculativer Sätze* in turn address fundamental intellectual dilemmas or apparent paradoxes in nature: permanence and change, being and becoming, the one and the many. Once again, the (mythical) origins of Metaphysics itself lie within their earliest philosophical ruminations.

In the late modern era, the rise of phenomenology and pragmatism is characterized primarily by the quest to get behind theory-laden appearances in favor of direct, unmediated experience: James’s “ceaseless primordial flux,” or what Husserl termed the *epoche*. Heidegger postulated that an unsullied record of such unmediated experience of Being itself was to be found in the work of the Pre-Socratics, toward which we must turn in authentic pursuit of the “Call of Being.” An immensely creative and largely-lost period of metaphysical collaboration and exchange among early phenomenologists and pragmatists, led by Husserl, Heidegger, Royce, and Hocking, was tragically quashed by the onset of World War I, whose centenary we are now in the midst of recollecting (even as the Critical Edition of Whitehead project seeks to recover salient features of this broader philosophical collaboration).

Accordingly, papers are invited for this MSA annual meeting on any of the myriad suggestive aspects of this meeting theme: the origins and historical interplay of science and metaphysics; the perennial problems of the One and the Many, Being and Becoming, *Mythos* and *Logos*, Permanence and Change; the significance of individual pre-Socratic philosophers themselves; their mythical roles or symbolic impact on the development of important fields of philosophy, from the Logic of Permanence (Parmenides) to the (Process) Philosophy of Change (Heraclitus). The influence of the Pre-Socratics on modern metaphysicians (such as Hegel and Whitehead) presents an additional avenue of exploration. But, as always, papers on any aspect of metaphysics will be considered in blind peer review for the annual program. The presidential address will feature contemporary reflections on Anaximander’s brief and cryptic account of the “Ordering of Time.”

Venue

The meeting will be held in Annapolis, Maryland, an historic site on the Chesapeake Bay that is home to two venerable, but quite distinctive educational institutions: the U.S. Naval Academy, and St. John's College (home of the "Great Books" core curriculum). Annapolis itself is home to the capital of Maryland during the Colonial era, and briefly served as the Nation's capital, where it served as the backdrop for George Washington's historic resignation, before the Continental Congress, of his commission as Commander in Chief of the Continental Army.

Annapolis lies within easy reach of Washington D.C., Baltimore, and Philadelphia, and is also the gateway to the Eastern Shore (the "DelMarVa Peninsula"), all sites of some of the earliest European settlements in the New World. The Chesapeake Bay itself is the world's largest marine estuary, teeming with aquatic and bird life, and home to some of the best seafood and sailing in the world. This location lies within a few hours drive of many eastern seaboard cities, from Atlanta to New York and Boston. The region is served by three major airports, all within 30-60 minutes of Annapolis, and by two metropolitan Amtrak rail station complexes in Baltimore (Penn Station and BWI airport) and Washington (Union Station and New Carrollton).

The meeting hotel and headquarters will be at the Lowe's Annapolis Hotel, in the heart of colonial Annapolis within easy walking distance of the sites and institutions of colonial Annapolis referenced above (<https://www.loewshotels.com/annapolis/>). The meeting will be preceded by a session of the Society for the Study of Process Philosophy (SSPP) on Thursday late afternoon, followed by a formal reception for all arriving MSA participants. The official opening of the meeting itself will be on Friday morning with an official welcome and keynote address, and the annual presidential address and banquet will be held on Friday afternoon and evening, respectively. Sessions will be scheduled throughout the day Saturday, and on Sunday morning, and provide ample time for the tours we will schedule for interested attendees and their families of St. John's College, the Naval Academy, and colonial Annapolis itself. Weather permitting, a two-hour sunset sail on the Chesapeake on Saturday afternoon will be available for up to 40 participants at a modest additional cost, featuring wine and *hors-d'oeuvres*, prior to inviting all present to dine in town on their own.

Suggestions: bring the family, treat them to a Chesapeake spring break vacation afterwards. Either visit the national sites of Washington, DC, or drive the kids down the Eastern Shore of MD and VA to visit Chincoteague and Assateague Islands, see the ponies, and stop at St. Michael's, MD on the way: "the Town that Defeated the British" during the War of 1812. (It was our only victory before New Orleans!) Plan to eat oysters and crabs in abundance!