

The Metaphysical Society of America: 76th Annual Meeting
March 19-21, 2026 (Thursday-Saturday)
New Haven, Connecticut

-- On a theme selected in recognition of the resurgent interest in systematic metaphysics as first philosophy --

Keynote Speaker: Paul Franks (Yale)
Plenary Session Speaker: Sebastian Rödl (Leipzig)

Cosponsored by the Yale University Department of Philosophy (*birthplace of the MSA*)

Metaphysics and the Authority of Intelligence:
On the Noetic Grasp of Fact as Meaning across Domains of Knowledge

Troublingly influential challenges to the authority of intelligence in the various domains of knowledge constituting the sciences and humanities have antecedents that stretch back to antiquity. Many of us have had firsthand experience with the socially and culturally corrosive impacts of such challenges on the institutional fabric of civilized life. Media-fueled epistemological skepticism, political and crudely empirical sociological positivisms, and anti-intellectualism in general subvert the very nature and warrant of our grasp of fact as meaning, and of that meaning as a noetic inflection of what *is*. Unsettling developments in public discourse, the technologies of communication, and the sociology of knowledge render precarious the standing and influence of scientifically disciplined theoretical and practical reason. And such developments hamstring the informed, critically balanced, and seasoned reflective judgment vital to the rationality, coherence, and indeed the legitimacy of the institutions that sustain civil culture and enable it to flourish. The philosopher who sees such trends as marking, at bottom, a tragic decline in what counts as a sufficiently rational grasp of fact-as-meaning may also reckon them as evidencing a calamitous erosion of the authority of intelligence in cultural life – a pathology of “Objective Spirit” that palpably erodes the quality of personal life and arguably imperils a *sensus communis* defined and sustained by its hold on the incommensurable worth of human dignity as a sovereign fact.

For those with “eyes to see and ears to hear” systemic philosophy in the Great Tradition constitutes an inexhaustible organon of ever-vital, *actionable* insights into the character and onto-epistemological implications of our grasp of fact as meaning (including the meaning of *that* fact). This is historically informed, critically (and self-critically) acute metaphysical philosophy that rejects, as deficiently intelligent, the one-sided thinking that brackets *knowing from being*, which is to say thinking that prescinds epistemology from systematic ontology and that fails to address the “somehow” in that most pregnant Aristotelean teaching that the knower (as such), the act of knowing, and the thing known are “somehow” the same.

From this standpoint, systematic metaphysics as first philosophy is a living legacy with a decisive, potentially transformative relevance for rational understanding and by extension for confronting the challenges to a civilizing commitment to the authority of intelligence. Not IQ “intelligence” but rather the agent intelligence that noetically underwrites the legitimacy of discursive analysis: Intelligence as agent of the truths, orientational and practical, of the principle that *knowing is of being* (cf., Plato’s noesis beyond the dianoetic, for example, or Aristotle’s *nous poietikos*, Hegel’s *Intelligenz*, or the *intellectualisme* Rousselot traces in Thomas Aquinas).

Signal contributions to this organon of philosophical wisdom – ancient, medieval, modern, and contemporary – range from Book VI of Plato’s *Republic* and Aristotle’s *De anima* Book III (430a10 ff.) to Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed* (I 68) and Aquinas (*ST*, *SCG*), to Hegel’s psychology of *Geist* and Whitehead’s *Adventure of Ideas*. The twentieth-century saw any number of significant, if insufficiently credited contributions to the systematic metaphysical thinking that makes explicit what’s at stake, both orientationally and practically, in probing as First Philosophy the onto-epistemology of our grasp of fact as meaning. Among others, the list of such philosophers includes British idealist logicians (think Bosanquet, H. W. B. Joseph, W. E. Johnson), neo-Kantians (Rickert, Leonard Nelson), and distinguished members of the MSA itself (from Weiss and Findlay to Neville, Blanchette, and Desmond). Two notable more recent contributions to this signature current of Western metaphysical speculation are Sebastian Rödl’s *Self-Consciousness and Objectivity* and, in the emergent metaphysically self-critical analytic vein, Christopher Peacocke’s *Primacy of Metaphysics*.

A call for papers (abstracts due by October 1, 2025) will be published in May. Papers selected for presentation will focus on the defining authority of intelligence as a power that at once discloses the character and delineates the limits – formal, practical, orientational – of the thinking associated with discursive reasoning; specifically, discursive reasoning relative to the modes of thought that animate any of the culturally formative domains of knowledge: art, the exact and physical sciences, information science, religion, moral philosophy, political philosophy.

Two cash awards (\$500) for outstanding papers:

1) junior faculty (Plato Prize); 2) graduate student (Aristotle Prize)

Some travel funds available for graduate students who register to attend.

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The MSA has been a constituent of the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) since 1958