

A hand holding a pen over an open book, with the text overlaid on the image.

Inaugural DECADE and Mentoring Women in Philosophy Lecture: Amie Thomasson (Dartmouth)

April 16, 3-5 pm

Redirecting Metaphysics

Two approaches have dominated recent work in metaphysics: an explanatory approach and a truthmaker approach. Both rely on an unargued and problematic assumption: that all discourse serves the same function. Here I will focus on the truthmaker approach, arguing that we are led into a variety of puzzles and difficulties if we assume that all indicatives aim to describe features of the world that explain what makes them true. We can gain a greater appreciation of the diverse functions that language serves by turning to work in Systemic Functional Linguistics. This enables us to diagnose the problems behind the truthmaker conception of metaphysics and why they arose. It also enables us to diagnose a host of other problems in metaphysics, including why eliminativist, fictionalist, and reductive approaches alike tend to be misguided, and why an appreciation of functional pluralism combined with an easy approach to ontology provides a useful alternative. In closing I will discuss how we should reconceive of our work, in ways that redirect us away from many traditional metaphysical questions, and towards useful new territory that involves both descriptive and normative conceptual work.

The last 30 minutes will be reserved for grad students to talk with Professor Thomasson.