

The Department of Sociology and Communication
Budapest University of Technology and Economics (BME), Budapest, Hungary, and

The Budapest Workshop for Language in Action
Department of Logic, Institute of Philosophy, Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE), Budapest, Hungary

present, as part of their *Action and Context* series,

EMPTY NAMES

Date: May 21 (Wednesday), 2025, at 9.30 a.m.

**Location: Room 704 (Building E, near Petőfi Bridge, Buda side), BME campus
Budapest University of Technology and Economics, Budapest, Hungary**

No empty names, no problems?

A lecture by

Chris Tillman

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Commentary on Chris Tillman:

Empty names and

artifactualism about the likes of Vulcan, Pegasus, and Pippi Longstocking

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ABSTRACTS:

Chris Tillman: No empty names, no problems?

Puzzles of nonexistence are ancient and philosophically central. Analytic philosophers tend to examine these puzzles through the lens of “empty” (i.e., non-referring) names, like (presumably) 'Pegasus' and 'Vulcan'. If 'Pegasus' and 'Vulcan' are empty, then how can 'Pegasus is winged', 'Vulcan is a planet', or 'Pegasus/Vulcan does not exist' say *anything at all*, nonetheless something believed, or something true or false?

In response, some philosophers have developed views that entail there are no empty names. Can these problems—problems of empty names in particular, and nonexistence more generally—be solved by maintaining there are no empty names?

In my talk I argue that no such solution can succeed; even if it were true that there are no empty names, we'd be in a position to *make* new empty names, which allow all of the old problems to be re-introduced. If we want a solution to problems stemming from empty names, we need to look elsewhere; a fully general solution must engage with the semantics of apparently empty expressions. Empty names are here to stay.

Zsófia Zvolenszky: Commentary on Chris Tillman's talk

I will briefly explore how Chris's arguments bear on one related debate we have both contributed to over the years, about what are and aren't good reasons for artifactualism about failed scientific posits (like LeVerrier's Vulcan), about mythical characters (like Pegasus) and about fictional characters (like Pippi Longstocking).

According to artifactualism about O-type objects, O's are human-made objects that are non-concrete, that is, they are *non-concrete artifacts*. Philosophers (Saul Kripke, Peter van Inwagen, Amie Thomasson among others) have put forth a range of arguments for why to be an artifactualist about various social and cultural constructions (like games, songs, laws, for example) including fictional characters like Pippi. Why be an artifactualist about Pippi, possibly about Pegasus, *but not about Vulcan*? I concur with Chris that there are strong reasons to hold this sort of *nonparallel artifactualist stance* and resist artifactualism about Vulcan (see Chris's and Joshua Spencer's: “Creature Features: Character Production and Failed Explanation in Fiction, Folklore and Theorizing”, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 2023). Why think otherwise? Why not go all the way to a *parallel artifactualist stance* that includes among the non-concrete artifacts, in addition to fictional characters like Pippi, also Vulcan (as philosophers like Nathan Salmón, David Braun, Ben Caplan have)? Chris's presentation highlights why scrutinizing the reasons for maintaining a parallel artifactualist stance is crucial and points to further reasons against holding such a parallel stance.

The organizers welcome all interested.

Tibor Bárány (BME), Zsófia Zvolenszky (ELTE)

