

5th London Ancient Science Conference

UCL, March 10th 2010.

Abstracts

[Conference main page](#)

[Paper Titles & Timetable](#)

Dr. Barbara Sattler - The conceptual basis for motion and change in Greek atomism.

Parmenides's conception of negation and existence and his criteria for knowledge lead to the expulsion of natural philosophy from the realm of reason. The main point of my paper will be a demonstration of the atomists' very different interpretation of those notions which extends the realm of the logically possible, and thus establishes the basis for a first coherent conception of motion and change.

Dr. Dirk Couprie - The Gnomon, the Merkhyt, and the Qumran Roundel: A Comparative Approach.

In my paper I will compare three instruments that look rather different: a vertical staff or rod called gnomon, a horizontal plank with a head at one end, in ancient Egypt called *merkhyt*, and a saucer found at Qumran. Yet they are all three called 'shadow-clock'. I will argue that this name is somewhat misleading, as these instruments do not tell the time. In the second place I will argue that they are very useful as tools for making appointments. As far as I know, this interpretation is new. And finally I will argue that the gnomon, being by far the simplest apparatus, is actually the most powerful and multi-functional of the three.

Prof. Peter Adamson - Galen and Al-Razi on Time.

In this paper I gather the evidence for Galen's views on time, as were set forth in the now lost "On Demonstration." I consider an apparent conflict between the Greek and Arabic traditions on this topic: both sets of evidence show that Galen was attacking Aristotle's definition of time, but the Arabic evidence goes much further in ascribing a positive theory of time to Galen. Time permitting I will also discuss Galen's influence on al-Razi, one of the thinkers who informs us about Galen's view.

Dr. Andrew Gregory - The Presocratics and the Supernatural.

There is a critique of the view that the presocratics offered exclusively natural explanations of phenomena, which says they still believed in gods, the divine, magic and animism. I offer some thoughts on the distinction between natural and supernatural, the idea of natural magic and Greek philosophical conceptions of god. I argue that even if the presocratics held the beliefs attributed to them by the critique, this does not entail that they believed in anything supernatural.

Dr. Jay Kennedy - Plato and Pythagoras, Music and Mathematics.

Walter Burkert and Carl Huffman have substantially advanced our understanding of the early Pythagoreans, but surprisingly argued they had little influence on the core of Plato's philosophy. This paper will examine music theory and mathematics in Plato and find some evidence for stronger Pythagorean connections.

Dr. Fiona Leigh - Changeless Causes? Reflections on Plato's Sophist

'Plato postulates Forms as changeless causes in his dialogues. I show that in the Sophist he directly confronts and rejects the intuition that whatever acts as a cause undergoes change, and I explore potential justifications for Plato's postulation of a causal connection between Forms and their participants.'

Michalis Sialaros - Revisiting Euclid: An investigation of the affinity of the Elements and the Data.

The Data (Δεδομένα) is one of Euclid's extant treatises and perhaps the most famous after the Elements. Most modern scholars, by associating the two texts, support the idea of the "tool-box"; namely, that for his proofs in the Data, Euclid used –without any citation- theorems from the first six books of the Elements. This view has been fairly established over the last years. In this paper, I will further expand the "tool-box" by arguing that, conversely, the propositions in the Data were used to support the proofs of some of the propositions in the Elements. This idea, which I will call – for obvious reasons- the "shared tool-box", changes our customary image of Euclid by offering a unified understanding of his mathematical practice. Moreover, it offers an answer to the underlying riddle of what the mathematical purpose of the Data was.