

Rapport voor Neil Dewar. (2013)

The jury considered the nomination of Neil Dewar "Symmetries in Physics; a linguistic approach" nominated by David Wallace to be a very careful, well-written thesis that takes aboard much of what has recently been written about philosophical aspects of space-time symmetries. Of course, the main claim to originality (judging from the title) is to bring in ideas from the philosophy of language; and more precisely, the idea that the question of which models of a space-time theory should be taken as representing one and the same physical reality, is seen as analogous to the question which linguistic terms or sentences are take to be synonymous, i.e. have the same reference.

The jury takes this analogy to be both original and valuable: no one the jury knows of, and no author cited here has ever made that point. Furthermore, it draws different areas of philosophy (of language and of science) that seem to develop in blissful ignorance of each other, into close contact.

The jury finds find this thesis to be admirably competent, clear, and well-written, to an extent that surpasses what would be expected in a Master's Thesis. It has elements of originality which, admittedly, are not shown to resolve any issues that could not have been resolved otherwise, but nevertheless bring to bear an interesting and long-overlooked analogy between philosophy of physics and of language that may inspire others.

For a research paper submitted to a journal, the jury would think this qualifies for a reserved acceptance (after reduction in size). For a student's Master's Thesis this is an outstanding achievement, and since the Hanneke Janssen Memorial Prize is about honoring a Master's student, the jury feels Neil Dewar fully deserves the prize.
