

Conference
The current state of Analytic Philosophy in Europe
ECAP 6: Sixth European Congress of Analytic Philosophy
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It is a common opinion that the history of analytic philosophy tells the story of a diaspora of many and talented thinkers who were forced by the dreadful growing of fascism in Europe to escape to the United States, where they found safety and intellectual freedom. Europe was thus deprived of their best minds. The post-war period witnessed the rising of analytic philosophy as a distinctive academic discipline, whose role became dominant in the United States thanks to many of those emigrated intellectuals. With the exception of British and Scandinavian philosophers, analytic philosophy did not arise as a paradigm in continental Europe and the contributions to the analytic community appeared peripheral to the core Anglo-American debates. There are a number of reasons that explain why this happened beyond the mere historical contingency. However, in the last three decades, the situation has dramatically changed.

The European Society for Analytic Philosophy (ESAP) testifies to this change and shows that the presence of analytic philosophy in Europe is no longer a matter of the occasional interests of individual academics. Founded in 1991, ESAP has the explicit intent of regaining the universality of values and aspirations of analytic philosophy and to contribute to the revival of this tradition in continental Europe.

The main event organised by ESAP is its general conference (European Congress of Analytic Philosophy – ECAP), held on a regular basis once every three years. Since the beginning in 1993, Ecap meetings attracted many scholars from different countries (mainly, but not only European) and rapidly became one of the main international happenings in world philosophy. Nowadays, ECAP conferences represent a significant opportunity to assess the state of art and the direction of analytic philosophy with regard to the European culture.

The Sixth European Congress (Ecap 6) took place in Krakow last summer (August, 21-26), in collaboration with the Institute of Philosophy of the Jagiellonian University and the Polish Academy of Sciences. The large number of speakers (over 500) was spread out on an entire week of parallel sessions, and organised into nine sections (history of philosophy, logic, philosophy of language, epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of science, philosophy of mind, ethics, and social philosophy). The congress hosted also five focus workshops (“Formal Methods in Philosophy”, “Structured Meanings”, “Minimalism”, “Methods of Analysis in Metaphysics”, “Values and Value Bearers”), while the plenary lectures were given by Dorothy

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Edgington (University of London), Zoltan Gendler Szabò (Yale University), and Andrea Bottani (University of Bergamo), who was the invited speaker for the 2008 *Dialectica* lecture.

In the opening lecture, “Counterfactual Thinking and Why it Matters”, Dorothy Edgington examined the role that counterfactual judgments play in empirical reasoning by showing their usefulness and importance in coming up with reliable factual conclusions. According to Edgington, judgments explain and justify not only doxastic beliefs but also some of our reactions such as “being glad” or “sorry”, “relieved” or “regretful”. Widening the spectrum of counterfactual justification from modal validity to empirical reliability represents an important advancement in several directions: on one hand, it shows that the metaphysical presuppositions of counterfactual capacities (whether or not modelled in terms of possible worlds) are at work also in empirical reasoning, *pace* modal sceptics. On the other hand, it shows that the range of justifiability does not follow exclusively from a top-down notion of validity, but requires a bottom-up account of its reasonableness, a way of looking at counterfactuals that recalls Goodman’s original proposal of a reflective equilibrium between inferences and rules of inferences. Finally, Edgington’s lecture opened up the space of counterfactual analysis to reactive attitudes, which are essential cases both in the attribution of responsibility and, more generally, in moral psychology.

Dialectica, one of the most prestigious international journals of philosophy and official organ of ESAP, sponsors since 2005 a lecture series. Lecturers are chosen among distinguished international scholars, in recognition to their philosophical achievements. This year’s guest speaker, Andrea Bottani addressed the topics of the metaphysics of time in relation to the problem of change. He focused on timeless properties by sketching the difference between the theories of persistence (the view that things exist at a number of times as more than a collection of things, each of which exists at just one time) and anti-reductionist theorists of persistence (the view that ordinary things exist at many times, partly or wholly). An interesting conclusion drawn by Bottani’s careful analysis of timeless properties (say “being flat”), is that change requires ontic indeterminacy, i.e., for any entity, having a property at one time and not at another cannot be just a matter of tense, but – and more fundamentally – it is possible only if “it is indeterminate whether it is timelessly flat or not”¹.

Szabò’s closing lecture on “The ontological attitude” was an overarching analysis of the meta-ontological implications of the different theories of the contemporary debate. A common concern of these theories is to resist a sort of trivialization of the nature of existing entities, without repudiating common sense and scientific intuitions about what it means for an entity to exist. In particular, Szabò’s analysis concentrated on fictionalism, showing some difficulties with this strategy. The criticisms of fictionalism serves as a premise for Szabò’s own proposal: believing ontological claims is not a sufficiently strong criterion for a general ontological theory, as we often believe things without really understanding what believing them amounts to. Any viable ontological theory must be consistent with the aim of inquiry “in order to understand a claim about certain putative entities one needs an explanation of what

¹ Volume of Abstracts, p. 10. Readers interested in single contributions can find the volume to Abstract at: <http://ecap.phils.uj.edu.pl/welcome>



those entities are”². Such attitude requires a Cartesian attitude – the right ontological attitude according to Szabò – that is a quest for those beliefs that are composed by the clear and distinctive ideas. These beliefs (far from being trivial) express the core elements of ordinary and scientific knowledge, which any ontology should take into account if it wants to be explanatorily fruitful.

Szabò’s lecture on meta-ontology is indicative of a promising development of analytic philosophy in Europe, whose most original contributions, one might say, rely upon its origins (both recognized, such as Frege, or overlooked, as in the case of Brentano). Evidences of this general trend are both the section on Metaphysics and Ontology (perhaps the most attended) and the workshop organised by Arianna Betti (Vrije Universiteit - Amsterdam) on “Metaphysics and its methods”. The workshop started from an anti-semanticist standpoint: “In contrast with traditional analytic philosophy, recent works in metaphysics area show dissatisfaction with linguistic or semantic arguments for or against entities”³. The speakers invited to the workshop discussed several issues deriving from the rejection of a semanticist criterion, and possible ways to give substance to the idea of a serious non-semanticized metaphysical work. However, setting up criteria of metaphysical admissibility calls into question the justifiability of those very criteria. As an example, consider whether naturalism should be in the list of what a good metaphysics should explain. If yes, a posteriori methods seems required; on the other hand, even if we reject armchair philosophy in name of a naturalistic approach, one might wonder whether primitive metaphysical notions would be intelligible without presupposing some basic semantic or conceptual analysis.

The workshop on “Kinds of value and kinds of value Bearers”, organised by Kevin Mulligan (University of Geneva) and Wlodek Rabinowicz (Lund University), was dedicated to theories of value across different fields of research: aesthetic and ethical values, epistemic values, values in terms of personal welfare. The discussion was framed around concerns in formal axiology (the logic of value, the conceptual distinctions and connections between different value types, the relationships between value concepts and normative notions). Among the topics we should mention: what kinds of objects bearers of value can be (persons, things, actions, character traits, social systems, states of affairs, facts, etc.) and how these kinds of values are to be distinguished or related.

The workshop entitled “Formal Methods in Philosophy” - organised by Stephan Hartmann (Tilburg University) and Hannes Leitgeb (Bristol University) - focused on the recent revival of formal methods in philosophy by addressing its origin and general limits of formalization in different areas of philosophy.

Problems connected with the set-theoretical conceptions of meanings and concepts were the subject of the “Structured meaning and concepts” workshop organised by Pavel Materna (Masaryk University in Brno) and Marie Duží (VSB-Technical University of Ostrava). Set-theoretical conceptions of meaning are typically functions from intensions to possible worlds. These approaches to semantics are subjected to several criticisms (e.g.: linguistic competence cannot be explained as a matter of knowing such functions). The workshop proposed a

² Volume of Abstracts, p. 8.

³ See the workshop description in the Volume of Abstract, p. 40



procedural semantics invulnerable to these attacks. According to this model, “meanings are algorithmically structure abstract procedures that are encoded by language expressions via linguistic conventions”⁴.

The workshop on minimalism – organised by Filip Buekens (Tilburg University/TILPS) – explored the limitations of the classical account of truth minimalism and discussed some recent attempts to accommodate minimalism with substantial accounts of truth.

As for what concerns the parallel sessions, the variety of topics was so wide-ranging that we will not even attempt to give a summary. Here, we will just recall the contributions from the invited speakers to the thematic sessions.

Kristóf Nyíri (Hungarian Academy of Science – Budapest) addressed the lecture for Section 1 (history of philosophy). Nyíri presented an interpretative talk on McTaggart’s argument against the reality of time, showing that McTaggart’s ideas were indeed not as path breaking as one might expect, and “undeserved respectability” was given to his argument from the Einstein-Minkowski conception of space-time.

Section 2 (Logic and Computation) hosted Gabriel Sandu (IHPST, Paris) who presented an interesting attempt to systematize the notions of logical dependence and independence between terms, quantifiers and operators according to a game-theoretic paradigm (as opposed to the compositional one).

In Section 3 (Philosophy of Language), Genoveva Martí (ICREA & Universitat de Barcelona) defended the idea that a good philosophical methodology should not dismiss conceptual analysis; rather, far from being another case of armchair philosophy, conceptual analysis should be a guide for experimental philosophy, not the other way round. The case discussed by Martí was Kripke’s claim that names are not descriptive and Stich’s objections based on cognitive experiments.

Mike Martin (University of London) was the invited lecturer for Section 4 (Epistemology). He addressed the well-known McDowell’s reflections on non-conceptual content in his *Mind & World*, and showed how McDowell’s argument rests primarily on some assumptions about the self-awareness of our perceptual experience.

Achille Varzi (Columbia University) – invited lecturer for Section 5 on Metaphysics – discussed the classical problem of the metaphysics of natural properties: whether they belong or not to the furniture of the world. Varzi assumes the correctness of Dummett’s idea that Nature, as such, is not yet articulated in discrete objects, kinds, and properties. However, the Dummettian assumption does not imply any of the classical solutions to the problem of how can we provide a knowledgeable description of the world. The paper worked out an original position, which rejects strong realism on one side, without falling within any of the given views on the market (either idealism, irrealism, projectivism, relativism, or even post-modern anarchism). A sort of nominalist view was adumbrated during the discussion, although not explicitly addressed in the paper.

⁴ Volume of Abstract, p. 31.



In section 6, Thomazs Placek (Jagiellonian University, Kraków) presented a fine-grained analysis of the implication of John Bell's theorem, namely the thesis that "no physical theory [that] is realistic and also local in a specified sense can agree with all of the statistical implications of Quantum Mechanics"⁵. The philosophical significance of Bell's theorem consists of the experimental analysis of the metaphysics required by the theorem, namely which metaphysical premises justify the discrepancy between the results of a physical theory and the quantum mechanical statistical expectations. In particular, problems with the metaphysics of causation arise which call for an adequate explanatory framework. Placek proposed Nuel Belnap's branching space-times as the framework capable of capturing the spatiotemporal, probabilistic, and modal aspects involved by the theorem.

In section 7, Katalin Farkas outlined a new theory of the intentionality involved in sensory experience. In particular, Farkas defended the – quite heterodox - position that the best way to describe the intentional objects of perceptual experience is by conceiving of them as independent of the occurrence of the experience in question. This way, Farkas provides a basis for a theory of non-conceptual content, where the intentional features of sensory experience can be explained in terms of features belonging to the objects as such.

Section 8 (Ethics, Aesthetics, and Action Theory) hosted the lecture by Robert Hopkins (University of Sheffield), who presented a talk in which he discussed the idea of 'inflected' pictorial experiences. Inflected pictures involve an awareness of the features of their design. Hopkins clarified the properties which characterize pictures of this sort can be understood in turn only by reference to their design. Hopkins discussed some proponents of inflected experiences (notably, Lopes) and argued that, once we have a clear theory of inflection, it is hard to understand why it matters, beyond mere triviality.

The last section (Social & Political Philosophy, Philosophy of Law) hosted Peter Koller (Institute of Legal Philosophy – University of Graz), who addressed the relationship between the goals of the market (efficient coordination of economic activities) and the requirements of contractual justice. After an overview on some alternative approaches, Koller argued that the preconditions of market efficiency (free access, rationality, information, etc.) converge with the demands of contractual justice. In particular, Hopkins defended the claim that a theory of *fair market* should include a conception of distributive justice (an acceptable distribution of rights and endowments) in terms of contractual justice.

One might ask, in conclusion, whether a distinctive contribution to the analytic approach in philosophy can be found in Europe, or rather dismiss the expression "European" analytic philosophy as merely a geographical label. A growing opinion is that this latter dismissive judgment would be ungrateful and – after all - substantially wrong. However, it is not easy to say in what such newly gained (or re-regained?) distinctiveness would consist. Participants to ECAP 6 might wonder whether contemporary analytic philosophy in Europe is dispersed among different streams that hardly converge. But this impression could be generalized to philosophy in general, and does not seem to be an informative judgment. Rather, recurrent discussions among leading philosophers and schools in Europe shows a revival of metaphysical

⁵ Shimony, Abner, "Bell's Theorem", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/bell-theorem/>>.



concerns, but beyond the legacy of the semantic program of the founding fathers of analytic philosophy. Whether this is a way to revalue some neglected origins of the discipline we are not sure. But a growing importance tributed to metaphysics and ontology in recent years has no parallel in the American departments.

On a more sociological ground, so to speak, we should say that the importance of analytic philosophy in Europe has become stronger in countries traditionally associated with a different culture of philosophical thinking like France, Spain and Italy (as one can notice by the number of scholars from these national communities). This is also a sign, perhaps, of a more general trend in contemporary analytic philosophy, where the constant enlargement to new communities of research has changed – to some extent- the traditional centrality associated with the predominance of American academia.

Moreover, the contributed papers showed a good average quality and many young scholars exhibited an impressive technical competence beyond their strict area of competence.

On a less positive note, two aspects should be mentioned: first, whilst the conference drew a fairly international crowd, there still were few women philosophers in attending and giving papers (especially at the most prestigious and attended sessions). Second, the conference showed that some areas of philosophical analysis are still neglected and left aside from its core program. In particular, session sessions in practical philosophy (8 and 9) were less attended, and fewer papers were presented. Whatever reasons might explain under-representation in the case of women and of some disciplines, an improvement should be made, if as analytic philosophers we want to be faithful to the democratic ideal of a community led by principles of rigorous critical evaluation and discussion by peers.

This is, we think, a task for the new president of ESAP, Michele Di Francesco (Università San Raffaele, Milano), who was elected by the general assembly along with a new steering committee. Di Francesco's office will lead the society to the next European Congress, announced for 2011 in Milan, Italy. In the meanwhile, for more information about ESAP's activities, visit the following website: <http://www.dif.unige.it/esap/>. This webpage is regularly updated with information about other workshops and middle term conferences sponsored by ESAP and by other national societies of analytic philosophy.