

Report
Truth, Knowledge and Reality
SIFA (Società Italiana Filosofia Analitica) – IX National Congress
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The IX National congress of the Italian Society for Analytic Philosophy was held in Padua, from 23 to 25 September 2010. It was ambitiously titled *Truth, Knowledge and Reality* and has welcomed more than a hundred speakers from all over the world. It has been structured both in plenary and parallel sessions covering areas as diverse as aesthetics, practical philosophy, epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of science, logic, philosophy of language and philosophy of mind. Needless to say it is impossible even to think of giving a comprehensive account of the conference. In what follows we will then focus on some of the given talks.

We could not but start from one of the most important contributions to the overall congress. In a plenary session Stathis Psillos (University of Athens) and Mauro Dorato (University of Roma 3) have discussed Ontic Structural Realism¹ and the possibility to add modality in its support.

Psillos in his paper repeats his celebrated critique to OSR. It has been argued, in particular by French and Ladyman, that this critique can be overcome if only we add modality to the picture, i.e we require that structure has an irreducible modal nature. Psillos then rehearses various ways in which modality can be added in support of OSR and finds them all untenable. In particular he argues that the most promising strategy, that of employing so called structural universals, fails on both physical and metaphysical grounds.

Mauro Dorato, in his discussion of Psillos' contribution, has pushed his points even further. He claims that the compatibility claims between physics and metaphysics are indeed all we can ask and that we should stop imposing metaphysical categories, such that of structure, as intended sometimes by

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¹ OSR from now on.

OSR, in order to describe the ontology of natural sciences. Rather we should understand science in its own terms.

In what follows we focus on three different papers given in the parallel sessions. In the first one, *Towards a C-Theory of Time*, Matt Farr (University of Bristol) attempts to construct a theory of time that is a viable alternative to the main celebrated theories, namely A and B theories of time. The main difference between a C-theory of time and its more celebrated rivals is that this theory does away with the notion of directionality of time, understood as directionality of time itself rather than objects and events in time. Farr's main motivation for constructing such a theory comes from physics. Fundamental laws of physics such as laws of classical and relativistic dynamics, laws of the electromagnetic theory, and the Schroedinger's equation governing quantum evolution are all time reversal invariant. This fact, Farr contends, should be adequately reflected in a metaphysical theory about time. The primitive notion of such a C-theory should be Betweneess, B (e_1, e_2, e_3), for event e_2 is between events e_1 and e_3 . This account leaves open the question of the temporal relation holding between e_1 and e_3 and so it genuinely does away with any directionality of time. A major problem could come for this account when considering measurement in quantum theory. Suppose you have $e_1 =$ a quantum state being $c_1 |\uparrow\rangle + c_2 |\downarrow\rangle$, $e_2 =$ the quantum state being after a spin measurement $|\uparrow\rangle$ and $e_3 =$ the quantum state being after another spin measurement $|\uparrow\rangle$. The Farr's theory of time would be just able to say that e_2 is between e_1 and e_3 . However, based on our present knowledge of Quantum Mechanics, we would want to be able to say that there is just one possible direction for the quantum system evolution, namely e_1, e_2, e_3 .

The next paper we want to focus on is, in our opinion, one of the strongest presented. We are talking about Andrea Borghini (College of the Holy Cross) and Marco Nathan's (Columbia University) Diachronic Identity in Biology and Philosophy. This paper explores four different independent criteria for identifying individuals, i) morphology, ii) function, iii) evolutionary history and iv) development. The authors focus on the fourth criterion that has so far been rather neglected. They present a detailed case study, taken from recent biological studies in the fields of embryonic stem cells², in which, they contend, the first three identity criteria, would fail to distinguish individuals. They go on to argue, rather convincingly, that in the ESC case, the

² ESC from now on.

development criterion scores better. With these results, learned in close proximity to biological sciences, they rethink classical philosophical problems related to diachronic identity, such as persistence through time and change. Their work is one of the finest example of fruitful interaction between sciences and philosophical reflection at its best.

To conclude we spend two words on another work, namely Claudio Calosi's (University of Florence) *Metaphysics of Persistence and Unrestricted Composition*. In this paper the author sets out to prove rigorously that the endorsement of the rather controversial mereological principle of unrestricted composition, roughly the principle according to which given any two non empty sets of objects there always exist a mereological sum of those objects, dims one particular metaphysics of persistence, namely Three-Dimensionalism³, wrong. 3D roughly maintains that all material persisting objects are multilocated at temporally unextended spacetime regions. The author constructs a counterexample to such an universal claim using the principle of unrestricted composition. The weakness of this kind of argument is probably that it will appeal to a four-dimensionalist but will not move a three-dimensionalist. She will probably just insists that the argument shows we should not have bought into the unrestricted composition principle in the first place.

This works were chosen just to give a flavor of the entire conference. It covered basically every crucial field in contemporary analytic philosophy and had gathered together leading scholars and young researchers, discussing and confronting different approaches and thesis. And this is, supposedly, philosophy.

³ 3D from now on.

