Conference Report: Salzburg Conference for Young Analytic Philosophy 2011

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The *SOPhiA* conferences (Salzburg Conference for Young Analytic Philosophy / Salzburgiense concilium Omnibus Philosophis Analyticis) are intended to give young predoctoral philosophers the possibility to actively attend a professional conference, to tackle current, as well as classical, philosophical problems, and to discuss their own approaches with promising students from many different countries as well as with well-established experts. We are firmly convinced that this is a natural and necessary step for promoting the next generation of analytic philosophers and thus, strengthening analytic philosophy in general. Because we believe that the methods of analytic philosophy can be fruitfully applied to all areas of philosophy, the *SOPhiA* conferences do not have a thematic focus; this is also reflected by the fact that the talks given at *SOPhiA 2011* (and at *SOPhiA 2010*) covered all areas of philosophy.

1 Facts and Figures

SOPhiA 2011 was held from 8th until 10th September, 2011 at the *Department of Philosophy* (Humanities), *University of Salzburg*, Austria. There were 51 slots (20 minutes presentation/10 minutes discussion each), three plenary lectures (60 min/30 min each), and two affiliated symposia (45 min/25 min each). The slots were divided into the following sections (number of talks in brackets): Logic & Philosophy of Language (11), Epistemology (10), Ethics (7), Philosophy of Mind (7), Metaphysics & Ontology (5), Philosophy of Science (5), Philosophy of Religion (3) and Practical Philosophy (3). 120 young and young-at-heart philosophers from about 12 different countries attended the conference.

SOPhiA 2011 was sponsored by the *Department of Philosophy* (Humanities), *University of Salzburg*, the *Austrian Ministry of Science and Research*, the *Society for Analytical Philosophy* (GAP), the *Institute for Philosophy of Science* in Salzburg, *KRITERION – Journal of Philosophy*, and the *Administration of the Province Salzburg*.

2   Plenary lectures

All three plenary lectures were held in English.

In the first plenary lecture, Prof. Dr. Hans Rott (University of Regensburg) presented the current results of his joint work with Prof. Dr. Georg Brun (University of Zurich). His talk was entitled '*Enthymematic Validity*'. Enthymematic arguments are arguments in which at least one premise is missing in order for it to be valid. Rott argued in favour of the thesis that one needs to know something about the person who is arguing's state of belief in order to find out whether an enthymematic argument is valid: If P is a set of premises and c is a conclusion, then an argument with premise set P and conclusion c is enthymematically valid if, and only if, $B + P \vdash c$, where 'B' represents the set of beliefs of the person who is arguing at the moment he/she is saying 'c because of P'. The symbol '+' stands for an operation which is similar to addition, but needs further specification. Rott provided a proposal of how the validity of *serious enthymematic arguments* (c because of P, where P and c are elements of B), *hytpothetical enthymematic arguments* (c because of P, where neither P nor c is an element of B), and so–called *just for the sake of the argument enthymematic arguments* (c because of P, where $\neg P$ as well as $\neg c$ are elements of B) can be tested by different ways of specifying $B + P$ in $B + P \vdash c$.

The beginning of the second day of the conference was marked by Prof. Dr. Gerhard Schurz's (Heinrich–Heine–University Düsseldorf) plenary lecture entitled '*Causality as a Theoretical Concept, or: Metaphysics as Science*'. Schurz introduced causality as an asymmetric and non-transitive binary relation between distinct statistical variables. It is a theoretical term with empirical significance that is needed for explaining two differing (in)stability properties (linking–up and screening off) of probability distributions (probabilities are understood in the statistical sense here, i.e., as inductively inferred limit–tendencies of observed frequencies). He presented a general theory of causality which captures and generalizes some of Hans Reichenbach's intuitions concerning causality and probability: Whenever two statistical variables X and Y are correlated conditionally on a set M of variables of interest, then X and Y are connected by a causal path so that all colliders (or at least one of their descendants) and no non-colliders on this path are elements of M. Schurz concluded his talk by demonstrating how the empirical content of the theory of causality he presented can be enriched by adding additional constraints.

The conference was closed by a plenary lecture given by Prof. Dr.

Carlos Ulises Moulines (Ludwig–Maximilian–University Munich) entitled '*Theory–Structuralism: A Program for Analyzing Science*'. Moulines presented the basic ideas of how empirical theories, i.e., abstract, cultural, deep structured, and genidentical entities, can be language independently identified within a theory-structuralist's framework. When scientists use the term 'theory', it is not always clear to what entity they are referring by using this term. There are at least three possible candidates: (i) so-called theory elements T. Theory elements are ordered pairs consisting of a theory core K (consisting of models M, potential models PM, potential partial models PPM, constraints C, links L, and blurs B) and a domain of intended applications I. This is what is typically meant by the term 'theory'. (ii) So–called theory nets N, i.e., hierarchically organized nets of theory elements constructed through successive specializations of a basic theory element T. (iii) So–called theory evolutions E. Theory evolutions are diachronic sequences of theory nets with the same basic theory element T_0 and partially overlapping domains of intended applications I_i. This is what authors like Thomas Kuhn had in mind when they spoke of paradigm changes—if the basic theory element is changed, we leave the theory evolution and scientific revolution occurs.

3   Symposia

3.1   Philosophy of Religion

On the opening day, the conference began with a symposium on the philosophy of religion. Within the symposium there were three talks. The lecturers and the audience were prepared for the discussions with extra study material concerning the topics of the talks, provided some weeks before the conference. So, although the issues of the talks were very broad, an expert discussion could arise from them.

The first lecture was given by Prof. DDr. Norbert Hoerster (Mainz) and entitled '*Gibt es einen guten Gott?*' ('*Is there a good God?*'). Hoerster began his discussion of the problem of evil with the usual distinction between natural evil (e.g., natural disasters) and moral evil (e.g., theft). Regarding natural evil, Hoerster asked whether it is plausible to assume that for each evil there is some good of a higher order which may serve as compensation for the evil or for which the evil serves as a means to the good. He concluded that for many of the goods that are given by modern theists (e.g. beauty of the universe with evil vs. beauty without evil) one can easily imagine a possible world without the evil in question that does not lack the good. With respect to moral evil, Hoerster mainly

discussed the problem of the propensity to moral wrongdoing and closed his lecture with the provocative question of why God has provided some human beings with the propensity to child molestation and whether a creator that allows evil for testing ones ability of acting in a non-evil manner could not legitimately be called 'malignant'.

The second speaker, Prof. Dr. Reinhard Kleinknecht (University of Salzburg), gave a talk about preliminaries of the philosophy of religion entitled '*Was Religion nicht ist*' ('*On what religion is not*'). He explicitly stated that his talk was not a systematic investigation of the presuppositions and assumptions of the philosophy of religion but a more or less heuristic approach for a critique of those assumptions. As his main thesis Kleinknecht claimed that 'religion' as understood in natural language is not even partially co-extensional with this term when it is used in the philosophy of religion. He claimed and indicated by examples that philosophers of religion are mainly doing, in some way, theological investigations, but nothing that is linked with religious topics such as religious ceremony, special kinds of beliefs or feelings, etc.

As the last speaker within the symposium, Prof. DDDr. Clemens Sedmak (King's College London) talked about *thinking theologically*. He investigated the thesis that religious people have a special mode of thinking which might be irreducible to the classical mode of thinking. Very much simplified, one may see the common distinction (within Epistemology) between *knowing how something is* and *knowing that something is the case* as the main difference between Religious people's special mode of thinking and the classical mode of thinking, respectively. In the course of this, Sedmak referred to Eleonore Stump who thinks that these two modes of thinking are in fact irreducible and that for the former mode of thinking narratives play a very important role in as much as they mediate practical knowledge. As another difference, Sedmak claimed that religious people often assume that there is someone, namely God, who knows what they are thinking—that is, they assume that God is in some way or another present in their thinking, like someone may assume that, while writing a vivid letter to a person, the person is present in her thinking. Sedmak thinks that this feature of thinking theologically can be modelled by theories of second person perspective.

3.2   Formal Ethics

Throughout the history of science, the use of mathematical methods has allowed us to gain an enormous amount of knowledge. This has enabled us to build space shuttles and computers, to calculate the weight limit

of a bridge and led to the construction of microwaves. Regardless of whether you study physics, chemistry, psychology, or any other science: you will have to invest quite some time to get yourself acquainted with the mathematics you need in order to understand modern scientific theories and their results. From the beginning of the twentieth century on, formal methods finally found their way into philosophy. Of course, mathematical methods always have been present in logic, but philosophers then started applying them considerably to different philosophical concepts, questions and problems. And in that way many interesting and relevant results have been established; it (finally) became possible to answer philosophical questions in a satisfactory and precise way. In epistemology and philosophy of science, mathematical methods are already widely-used. In ethics things are still a bit different, but formal methods are getting more and more popular there, too. We were very glad to get four well-known formal ethicists to speak at the *SOPhiA* symposium on formal ethics which took place at the last day of the conference.

Prof. Dr. Heinrich Ganthaler (University of Salzburg) presented *Stig and Helle Kanger's logical analysis of human rights*. Within a slightly expanded first order framework Ganthaler was able to distinguish different types of rights (claim, freedom, power etc.) and to establish logical relations between them.

Prof. Dr. Edgar Morscher (University of Salzburg) took one step back in the contemporary debate on *Dyadic Deontic Logic (How to wake up the sleeping beauty)*. Most of the discussion in our time focuses on the (dyadic) deontic logic's ability to solve the so-called *paradoxes of deontic logic*. Morscher laid down some central principles which a (dyadic) deontic logic should contain and others which a (dyadic) deontic logic should avoid, and evaluated existing systems in relation to his principles.

Dr. Norbert Gratzl and Dr. Olivier Roy (both: Munich Center for Mathematical Philosophy, LMU Munich) presented some of their recent work on *Deontic Logic, Deontic Paradoxes, and Rationality*. After an analysis of the deontic paradoxes, Gratzl and Roy presented a new system of deontic logic which avoids paradoxical consequences. The presented system was based on neighborhood semantics. In addition the speakers also presented a sound and complete Hilbert-style axiom system. They concluded their talk with spelling out some interesting connections between deontic logic and game theory.

4   Summary

Summing up, *SOPhiA 2011* was a complete success: young and young-at-heart philosophers from different domains and countries had the possibility to spend three days experiencing exciting presentations and discussing topics from all areas of philosophy with like–minded people. As intended, the talks were characterized by usage of clear language, comprehensible argumentation and a high methodological level. At all three days of the conference, keynote speakers and predoctoral philosophers continued discussing the problems which had been tackled in the talks given throughout the day, in a pleasant atmosphere, far into the night.

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