



## Conference Report

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# Conference Report: SOPhiA 2021

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Between September 9 and 11 2021, 150 philosophers participated at the *Salzburg Conference for Young Analytic Philosophy 2021 (SOPhiA)*. The conference took place as a hybrid event – online and in-person – at the University of Salzburg, Austria.

During the conference, 124 young philosophers presented work on a wide range of topics within analytical philosophy. The contributions were divided into 10 sections: Epistemology, Metaphysics and Ontology, Ethics, Philosophy of Mind, Philosophy of Religion, Philosophy of Science, Political Philosophy, Logic, Philosophy of Language and History of Philosophy. Speakers came from many different countries; for example Germany, Poland, the Netherlands, the UK and Austria. The speakers were PhD and Masters students, along with several advanced undergraduates. The contributed talks were accompanied by four affiliated workshops as well as two sessions on academic publishing targeted at graduate students. The conference program was completed by three keynote talks given by Markus Schrenk (University of Düsseldorf), Herlinde Pauer-Studer (University of Vienna) and Marian David (University of Graz).

## 1 Keynote Talks

Markus Schrenk opened the conference with a plenary lecture entitled “What is Proprioceptive Art?”. He started by describing examples for the contemporary phenomenon of proprioceptive art. In these cases of artwork, the art recipients’ proprioceptive senses are appealed to in a prevalent way, for instance, when a recipient is supposed to float in a darkened and soundproofed tank as part of a piece of art. In his talk, Schrenk proposed a tentative definition of such artwork: a practice or artefact is proprioceptive art if and only if it qualifies as a piece of art (according to a theory of art) and evokes only or mainly the proprioceptive senses of its recipients. Finally, Schrenk argued that there are indeed practices and

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artefacts that qualify as proprioceptive art, according to his definition. The talk provoked a lively discussion which focused especially on Schrenk's explication of proprioceptive art.

On the second day of the conference, Herlinde Pauer-Studer gave the Metzler lecture (sponsored by *Metzler Publishing*) entitled "A Normative Argument for the Separation of Law and Morals". Her talk started by introducing the classic debate in philosophy of law on whether law and morality are necessarily connected. Using as a case study the "evil" National Socialist Law, she argued for a reconciliatory position: combining a necessary connection between law and morality with the insistence that both should be treated as separate normative realms. The connection between them, on her view, can be achieved by formal requirements that are part of the rule of law (such as predictability) but arise from moral reflection. Her talk was followed by an engaging discussion focusing on the details of her reconciliatory position.

Marian David concluded the conference with his plenary lecture entitled "Truth—Why Do Intelligent People Say So Many Odd Things about It?". David observed that philosophy students often express opinions such as "There is no truth" or "All truth is relative" when pressed on discussing what truth is. Similar observations, he contends, can be made in other intellectual settings. However, David argued, most of these students and intellectuals cannot actually mean what they are saying. Saying such things as that truth is relative or non-existent implies, he maintained, saying very odd things about the world. And, most of these people do not hold such odd beliefs about reality. David continued by suggesting an explanation for this phenomenon: The expressed opinions about what truth is are trained responses, embedded in a cultural setting, or moral statements rather than expressions of philosophical positions about the nature of truth. The stimulating Q&A picked up especially on possible socio-cultural explanations of the phenomenon David described.<sup>1</sup>

## 2 Contributed Talks

During each day of the conference, speakers presented their research in six parallel sessions, with each talk lasting 20 min followed by 10 min of Q&A. The contributions covered an impressive range of topics, both across and within different subdisciplines of analytical philosophy. For instance: Kimon Sourlas-Kotzamanis challenged the distinctiveness of Miranda Fricker's concept of epistemic injustice,

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Raimund Pils for valuable suggestions for the summary of David's keynote talk.

Max Theissen provided a new perspective on the debate concerning free will and determinism, Riya Manna asked how we perceive artificial moral cognition and Giuliano Rosella offered an expansion of causal modelling semantics. The hybrid format of the contributed talks allowed for online and in-person attendees, which resulted in many stimulating discussions. The abstracts of all talks can be found on the conference website: <https://www.sbg.ac.at/sophia/SOPhiA/2021>.

### 3 Complementary Program

Four parallel affiliated workshops took place on the second day of the conference. The first workshop “Scientific Impartiality and Marginalized Groups” discussed which role non-epistemic values should play in scientific reasoning, focusing especially on perspectives of marginalized groups. The workshop was organized by Sophie Nagler (University of Oxford/MCMP), Hannah Pillin (LSE/MCMP) and Deniz Sarikaya (University of Hamburg). The second workshop “Moral and Scientific Expertise” took a critical perspective on moral experts as compared to scientific ones. Alexander Christian (University of Düsseldorf) and Julia Mirkin (University of Düsseldorf) organized this workshop. The third workshop “Social Ontology of Bands and Other Musical Groups” focused on the ontology of music bands, aiming to establish a new subfield of social ontology dealing with the ontology of pop groups. This workshop was organized by Thorben Petersen (University of Oldenburg). The fourth workshop “Realities of Free Will” revived a classic topic in philosophy, namely how to defend free will in light of various threats such as the possibility of determinism. This workshop was organized by Maria Sekatskaya (University of Düsseldorf). The workshops took place in either a hybrid format or remotely.

In addition to the affiliated workshops, participants had a chance to get first-hand insights on academic publication processes in two devoted sessions. On the first day of the conference, *De Gruyter’s* commissioning editor, Christoph Schirmer, advised on how to publish a first article or book. On the second day, *Synthese’s* editor, Otavio Bueno, spoke about what to do and what to avoid when submitting journal articles.

### 4 SOPhiA Best Paper Award

The conference was accompanied by a Best Paper Award competition. On the first day of the conference, the sixth *SOPhiA Best Paper Award* was awarded to Glenn Anderau (University of Zurich) for his paper “Defining Fake News”. In his paper,

Anderau identifies core aspects of disagreement between existing definitions of fake news, before putting forward a novel account of fake news. The award is sponsored by *Kriterion – Journal of Philosophy*, where Anderau's paper is also now published.

## 5 Conclusions

Just as in previous years, the aim of *SOPhiA 2021* was to provide an opportunity for graduate students to get first-hand experience in presenting their philosophical work in a professional environment, and to meet upcoming and established philosophers. *SOPhiA 2021* showed that it is possible to achieve those aims, even in a hybrid format. Special thanks for organizing the conference goes to the local organizing committee consisting of Sebastian Sattlecker, Silvana Pani, Stephen Müller and Leonie Eichhorn, as well as to the programme committee consisting of Raimund Pils, Christian J. Feldbacher-Escamilla, Alexander Gebharter, Gregor Greslehner, Laurenz Hudetz, and Sebastian Krempelmeier. *SOPhiA 2021* was supported by *Kriterion – Journal of Philosophy*, University of Salzburg, *gap* (Gesellschaft für analytische Philosophie), *Schwabe Verlag*, *Metzler Publishing*, *De Gruyter*, Land Salzburg, *Springer*, Stadt Salzburg and *oegp* (Österreichische Gesellschaft für Philosophie). Further information about *SOPhiA 2021* is available at: <https://www.sbg.ac.at/sophia/SOPhiA/2021>.

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