SPSP Newsletter # 16

WINTER 2021

From the editor

The mission statement of SPSP[1] emphasises the importance of studying how science is practiced, past and present, as well as how science is used and communicated in society. There are, of course, many ways to achieve this mission. In this volume, we have interviewed two scholars conducting philosophy of science in settings that many of us only visit for a shorter period: *the museum* and *the scientific lab*. Rose Trappes' interview with Joana Formosinho takes us on a journey to the Medical Museion[2], a museum

[1] https://www.philosophy-science-practice.org/about/mission-statement
[2] https://www.museion.ku.dk/

and research unit in Copenhagen. Joana reflects on the productive potential of combining research in STS and HPS with creative efforts to visualise and display the key issues in a museum installation. Martin Zach and Tomas Marvan talk to Ann-Sophie Barwich about her interdisciplinary work on the history, philosophy *and* science of olfaction. She reports on how she, as a philosopher, became part of a neuroscience lab, and how this has influenced her account of "smellosophy" and views on philosophy of science in general.

In this volume, we also focus on another commitment of the SPSP mission statement - to stimulate an inclusive and supportive global research network. In the *SPSP Global* section, Ariel Roffé talks to Filippo Contesi, who has taken the initiative to the Barcelona Principles for a Globally Inclusive Philosophy[3].

This time, Erik Weber takes Saana Jukola's *Proust Questionnaire*. As you all know, Erik is the heroic local organiser of SPSP2018 *and* SPSP2022. We include the call for papers for SPSP2022 at the end of the newsletter and hope that you will all submit your contributions and we will get to see you soon in Ghent.

We wish you a wonderful and relaxing Christmas break.

On behalf of the SPSP-newsletter team,

Sara Green

The editorial team

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[3] https://contesi.wordpress.com/bp/

*1 - **Sara Green, University of Copenhagen***

*2 - **Saana Jukola, University of Bonn***

*3 - **Martin Zach, Charles University and the Czech Academy of Sciences***

*4 - **Maria Serban, University of East Anglia***

5 - ***Rose Trappes, Bielefeld University***

6 - ***Ariel Roffé, University of Buenos Aires***

Philosophy at the museum

Rose Trappes talks to Joana Formosinho about doing HPS and STS research in a museum

7 - Joana Formosinho[4] is a biologist and PhD fellow in STS and HPS at the University of Copenhagen (Medical Museion, Department of Public Health and CBMR)

You've been working on a museum installation about the holobiont at the Medical Museion in Copenhagen. Can you describe the piece?

It's an installation and performance piece called "Co-metabolise: a holobiont dinner." It aims to portray the holobiont as a process, something that we are but also continuously actualize in our day-to-day practices; in this case, eating.

The public are invited to dine at the table with their microbes—there is a low table that represents the cells inside the human gut—you can see all the folds and textures. On the table sits a glass bowl filled with active sourdough bread starter. Above the table hovers a kind of microbial mobile which represents the combined genetic composition of microbial species inside our gut, and also the hologenome of a sourdough starter.

Three times a week in a kind of ceremonial space facilitated by the artists, the public are invited to dine at the table with their microbes. They eat sourdough baked from the starter, at the same time that the starter is fed. Then, they are invited to close their eyes and enter a guided meditation where they imagine the process of eating and co-digestion happening inside them: the microbes feeding, digesting, excreting, and the human taking up some of these metabolites into our own health processes.

8 - Credit: David Stjernholm

How did you get involved with the project?

I'm doing a PhD at the Medical Museion[5] in Copenhagen. I am part of the interdisciplinary project Microbes on the Mind[6] funded by the Velux Foundations. My PhD is not about museum work,

[4] https://cbmr.ku.dk/staff_overview/?pure=en/persons/644896
[5] https://www.museion.ku.dk/en/
[6] https://www.museion.ku.dk/en/microbes-on-the-mind/

but one of my supervisors (Adam Bencard) is co-curator for the exhibition "The World is In You"[7]. He asked me if I'd be interested in having an exhibit that interpreted a key theme of my PhD project.

At the time my research had started to cluster around the concept of the holobiont, so it made sense to think about how to communicate that concept. Based on my supervisor's suggestions, I chose to work with an artist duo called Baum and Leahy[8] (Amanda Baum and Rose Leahy).

And how heavily were you involved in creating the piece?

I was heavily involved in the conceptual development of the piece. I also accompanied the process until delivery at the exhibition site. Initially, there were several rounds of talking to Amanda and Rose about what the idea was and what themes to get across.

Amanda and Rose had done a lot of work on microbial research, so they knew the concept already. I sent them articles on the holobiont for the public, inspirational pieces from the field, and little clips from presentations. They also shared previous inspirations from their earlier works, some of which was new to me. That was a nice interchange.

I wanted the piece to be dynamic and inviting to the public. This was a nice synergy with the artists because they are very playful in their work. I also wanted to communicate the holobiont concept as active—both as a thing and as a process, one that is changed day to day through our actions. A lot of our conversations were about how to get that message across.

Once we arrived at the idea of a holobiont dinner, inviting people to sit at the table and dine with the microbiomes, Rose and Amanda started producing drawings and models of the piece. We also involved a couple of microbiome researchers. They provided their own data to inspire the piece, and great creative input. One was François-Joseph Lapointe[9] of the University of Montreal, who had collaborated with the Museion before. Another was Rob Dunn[10] at North Carolina State—he had worked with the artists before. Rob introduced the idea of thinking about an extension of the holobiont to include the process of pre-digestion happening in sourdough baking, and shared his data with us. François-Joseph produced beautiful visualisations of Rob's data and his own microbiome data. Rose and Amanda interpreted these visualisations into the structure that hovers above the table.

[7] https://www.museion.ku.dk/en/the-world-is-in-you/
[8] https://www.baumleahy.com/
[9] https://qcbs.ca/member?profile=45
[10] https://cals.ncsu.edu/applied-ecology/people/rob-dunn/

9 - Credit: Marlene Anne Lough

What do you see as your role as a humanities scholar in this very interdisciplinary team?

At a very basic level, I introduced the holobiont as a theme of translational interest for the exhibition, and articulated how it was of interest. A second level was to set the parameters for what I wanted the piece to do and what I didn't want the piece to do. And I assessed how well this comes across through the ideas the artists were generating.

There was a two-way process of developing ideas. The first idea of having the piece centred around eating arose when I sent the artists an article by Hannah Landecker in Noema magazine about the microbiome and eating[11]. They loved that piece, and they came back with the idea that eating could work as a grounding practice that is relatable to people in their day-to-day lives.

The idea of using a sourdough starter came out of the artists talking to Rob Dunn, who had a study on sourdough with Lauren Nichols[12]. Rob had come up with the idea of an extended holobiont, with fermentation beginning the digestion process before it goes into us. This conversation, plus the fact that sourdough in Denmark is a huge thing, and the fact that I wanted a dynamic and interactive exhibit that portrayed the holobiont as a process not a fixed thing ... that all came together with the artists' playful

[11] https://www.noemamag.com/eating-as-dialogue-food-as-technology/
[12] https://laurenmnichols.wordpress.com/

sensibility and focus on engaging the senses, on textures and sounds. So we thought we could centre the piece around sourdough and eating, and make it a ceremonial space.

10 - Credit: Marlene Anne Lough

How did you find the process of creating a museum piece?

It was incredibly fun. Working on the piece has also brought out two reflections for me. The first is how interesting it is for a researcher to involve the public in the meaning-making of medicine and biomedicine as it is happening. At Museion, there is an ethos of not presenting medicine after the fact, but rather as an unsettled process. That has permeated into my own work.

Another thing is the focus on objects. Everyone here loves objects. The Museion really intersects science with art, so that the pieces are aesthetically engaging as well as being informational. Working on this piece forced me to think about the holobiont very concretely. How do you convey this as some kind of object? That was part of me becoming interested in the imagery of holobionts, which has made its way into a paper I am currently writing.

Did you learn anything that you think would help other scholars looking to work in museum contexts?

One is a practical thing: the different rhythms and paces of researchers versus artists. At least in this case, artists work more in creative bursts, not a steady pace. Once the groundwork of agreeing on the basic parameters of the piece was done, I had to learn to see my role as catalysing the art piece; the artists have done this before, so they will deliver at their own pace. Once you get a nice fire going, you just have to keep fuelling it a little, but you shouldn't do much more.

The other thing I became more aware of is how thinking about matters of translation of knowledge into a different field can really bring back something into my own field. The project got me thinking about the holobiont in new ways. Does the way we define the holobiont influence how researchers visualise it? Does that underlying imaginary influence how they do their research? I also started looking at people who have been developing their own definitions of the holobiont across disciplines, seeing how the concept is performed across fields of knowledge, and to what consequence.

There was a question at the start of whether this is time well invested. Because of course it doesn't go towards a paper. But I definitely found that it was very generative for my own research. The project itself was also quite contained, and the boundaries of my role were clear.

Would you do more public science and outreach activities in the future?

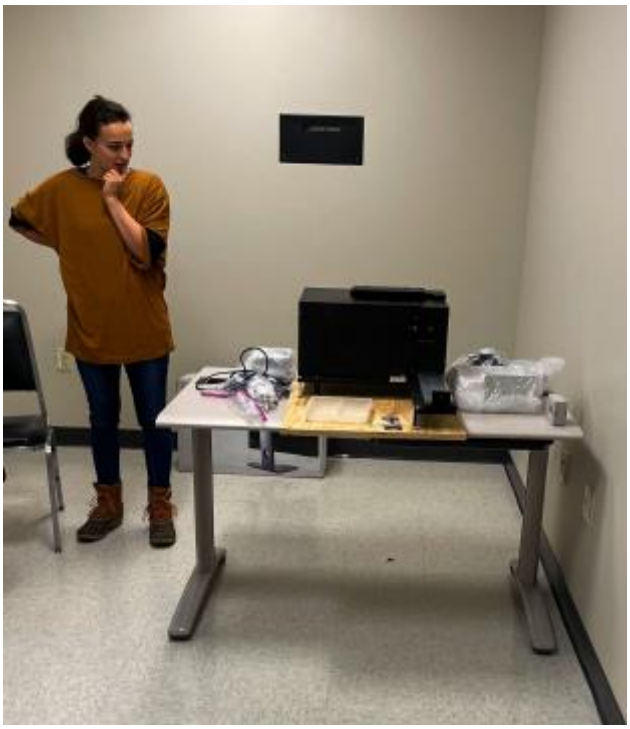
Yes, I definitely would. I found it very fun. Of course like any process there are points of stress, but I really enjoyed it and I found it generative for me.

What I might recommend is being clear about your role from the beginning, and how much you want to be involved. You can come in as co-creator or as research advisor ... Those roles involve different amounts of time and headspace.

You can catch the exhibit at the Medical Museion in Copenhagen until January 16th 2022.

Philosophy in the lab

Martin Zach & Tomas Marvan talk to Ann-Sophie Barwich about combining cognitive science and empirical philosophy in the science lab.



11 - Ann-Sophie Barwich[13] is assistant professor at Indiana University Bloomington, where she has a joint position at the Department of History and Philosophy of Science and Medicine and the Cognitive Science Program.

Your background is in philosophy but you ended up working in science labs. How did that happen?

It was a string of fortunate incidences (and, perhaps, some brazen decisions to go with unlikely events). I remember a talk by the extraordinary Hasok Chang when I was a fresh grad in Exeter. My entire brain rewired the moment that I saw a humanities scholar doing experiments. I wanted to do something like it, only in my way! Unrelatedly, I also changed my thesis topic halfway through the program (usually not advisable, my supervisor John Dupré was incredibly understanding). To be honest, I had drifted a bit aimlessly at the start of the thesis, and when I stumbled over the science of smell, I could not stop thinking about the open questions surrounding this underexplored sense.

What really kickstarted the move into science was during my first postdoc. At the KLI Institute when Hasok (then my thesis examiner) sent a mail out of the blue: "Do you know this guy called Stuart Firestein?" Stuart is a prominent olfactory neuroscientist at Columbia who is interested in HPS and had been on sabbatical at Cambridge at the time. So, I boarded a plane and stood in front of Stuart's door a few days later with a bottle of Schnapps. Well, I wrote an email first. Stuart and I hit it off right away. Later that year, I took a chance when a postdoc opening at Columbia invited cross-over projects between humanities and neuroscience (the PSSN program). I had little hope (Columbia … really) but

[13] http://www.smellosophy.com/

worked tirelessly on my project application for months. It miraculously worked out (I say miraculously, as I almost did not make the shortlist, I heard later -- Stuart was not on the committee, as one may assume from afar).

In the next three years, I worked in Stuart's lab each day, hung around at the biology department, and had the time of my life. That I would start my own lab a few years later remains an unexpected and thrilling turn of events. Now, despite being a bit haphazard, this sounds straightforward enough in retrospect. However, this whole trajectory builds on an endless string of rejections. My profile never seemed to fit anywhere, until I ended up at IU as a joint hire between the HPS Department and Cognitive Science Program. Long story short: I rolled the dice.

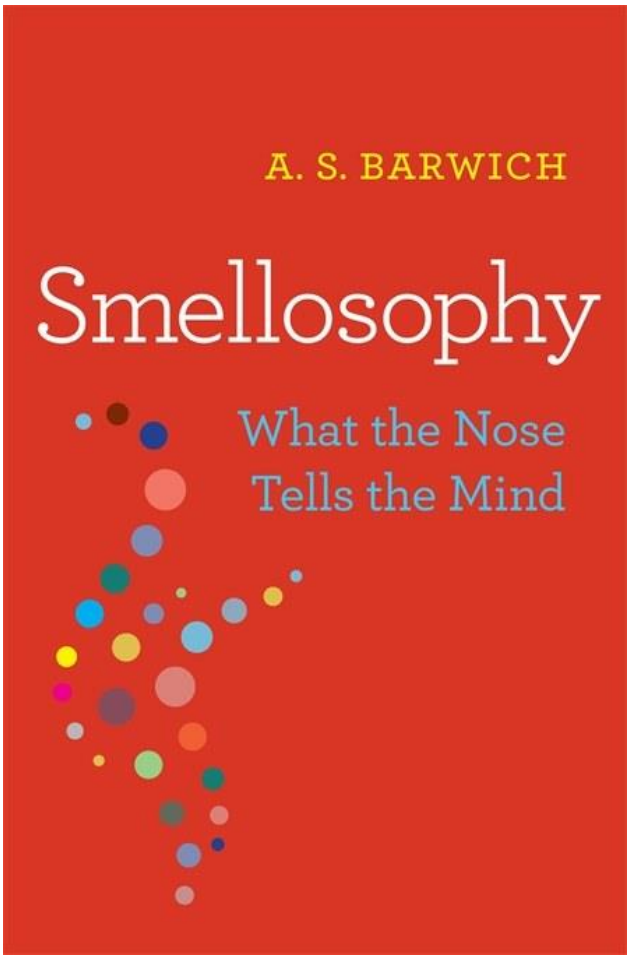
What have been the most rewarding and most challenging aspects of working in a science lab?

When I entered Stuart's lab, I quickly felt utterly unprepared. Science at the bench plays out very differently than science looks from the armchair, especially in an area like olfaction where the critical pieces are still constantly moving. The history of science always makes you wonder how it must have been to be there when it all happened. Suddenly, I was at the frontiers of this apparent niche field where it just did happen, in real-time. In fact, I was in a lab that undertook a study that would further change the field's outlook (it finally came out last year and is at the core of my book and several papers, it's the mixture study using SCAPE microscopy). So that was very exciting but also challenging, not just because you could not tell anyone concrete details except for "wait for it, trust me!".

In the end, I had to find a way to reconcile philosophy with science by recognizing just how the strengths of each discipline intersected in my work. It felt a bit like going through intellectual puberty, and I may have behaved like that at times. Besides, what also helped was meeting people in philosophy who pursued similar ideas, like Barry Smith in London. You can blame Barry for pulling me back into philosophy.

Is there any part of your work that could not have been written had it not been for your embeddedness in a lab? If so, what sort of difference has that made?

All of it (or at least what I published since 2015). That's far from an understatement. I interviewed 45 scientists and other olfactory experts for *Smellosophy* (the title of my book, which possibly led to some raised eyebrows). To ask questions at the field's pulse, you cannot rely on the published literature. That's 2-5 years behind the times with respect to what's going on now and where the field is heading next. Besides, when you are three years in a lab every day, your thinking and observation start to change. I once had an online dispute with another young HPS scholar who declared he had been in a lab for like 2-3 months and thus knew how science in practice works. I don't think so. The tacit knowledge and feeling for scientific practice are acquired like any other skill: through prolonged exposure and embeddedness, not a tourist visa.



12 - Smellosophy. What the nose tells the mind *is published by the Harvard University Press*[14].

Do you have any advice for those interested in pursuing that kind of work?

The same advice I got from Hans-Jörg Rheinberger (whose work I love). His advice was simple but impactful: "Just talk to people. Don't get bogged down with the formalities of what your discipline expects you to do. Go to the lab and talk to the people who do what you want to understand." I hope to meet him again and invite him to a drink as a thank you. And to add another note: get comfortable with being uncomfortable in your ignorance. That's what I learned from the many scientists who lent me their time.

People like Benjamin D. Young and Andreas Keller speak about unconscious, yet qualitative smells. According to them, we can literally smell unconsciously—our brain can access and evaluate olfactory information, including its qualitative aspects, even without consciousness. The main argument here is that behavioral reactions to unconscious smells, such as change in sniff volume and rate, are pretty much the same in conscious and unconscious conditions. This goes against much of the current theorizing about sensory consciousness. Typically, in philosophy of mind, one assumes that the qualitative aspects of olfactory and other states only pertain to the conscious mode of perceiving. In other words, these qualitative aspects, sometimes called "qualia", are assumed to be consciousness-

[14] https://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674983694

making. Their unconscious existence is then ruled out as conceptual impossibility. In your book, you say the following: "Smells are not always in explicit conscious awareness — but such unawareness does not mean that olfaction is not integral to conscious experience. Our mind might not knowingly track and attend to odors all the time." (Smellosophy, p. 91). This could imply that you side with Young and Keller and against the "qualia are conscious" tradition. What is your take on this?

I don't have much patience with talk about qualia anymore, to be honest. This is one of the most damaging conceptual artefacts that some philosophers seem to keep carving out a niche that science shall never touch. I agree with Ben and Andreas that olfaction is a great model to rethink the boundaries of conscious and unconscious processing, yet perhaps not for the same reasons.

I've been looking in detail at how the brain creates olfactory experiences, specifically the vast amount of information that your brain processes when encountering complex smells - not all of which is processed consciously at once. Brain processing is active and can spotlight various aspects in an activation pattern to align with other, parallel processes (cross-modal, attentional, etc.). So, the qualitative expression in one's conscious experience of an olfactory stimulus can shift, and it does so dynamically.

Think about it: when you have a divine glass of wine, and someone suddenly says, "Oh, I like that vanilla note." BAM! It's in your mind. It wasn't there before, but now it is. That's not an illusion, but a quick foraging process of activity in your brain, searching for the relevant information and bringing it from the backseat right to the front of your conscious experience. You don't need to evoke qualia here, understanding neuroscience is enough. That rattles some traditional philosophers of mind and possibly won't convince them (does anything empirical, ever?) -- and so I am grateful to Ben for fighting the battle of olfaction on the qualia turf. (Not sure I'd have the self-control.)

Do you think that one of the currently popular theories of consciousness - global neuronal workspace theory, recurrent processing theory, attention-based theories, and so on - is particularly suited to capture olfactory consciousness?

I'd reverse the question if I may. I think olfaction is a great model to explore these various frameworks in their assumptions and explanations of conscious experience further. I am not committed to any particular theory, as I want to understand how smell works and how understanding smell on its own account can tell us something more about mind and brain, not to use smell as another case study to apply a grander theory. If you want to pin me down to theoretical commitment, I'd say Helmholtz's account of unconscious inferences and ideomotor theory, which was ahead of his time.

It has become customary to speak about the brain as "coding" sensory information. The drawback of this metaphor is that it is unclear how and where the decoding happens. And it's the decoding phase of perception that is, of course, the most mysterious. How can a neurally coded information - roughly, volleys of neuronal firings - eventually produce something as peculiar as the smell of a coffee? Taking the metaphor of neural coding seriously, it is as if the brain was coding the sensory messages coming through the nose and sending them to a place storing a "sensitive matter". The olfactory messages would drum their content into this sensitive matter, and the sensitive matter would turn these messages into the wine of olfactory consciousness - from pleasant smells to the most repellent odours. However, we know that there is no such sensitive matter in the brain. It's coding all the way down; as Daniel Dennett put it, there is no "double transduction" in the brain. Which discoveries in

modern olfaction research are, according to you, on the path of uncovering the steps of the mysterious "decoding" phase?

The way I talk about (en)coding and computing in my book is intentionally in a processual and an embodied sense—the specific materiality of the system matters (for lack of a better expression). Looking at how the various neuronal connections and patterns interact and how the intricate molecular details determine these processes, many puzzling perceptual phenomena suddenly make sense.

I highlight that because I don't see some peoples' problem with neurobiology accounting for our experienced sensations. I mean, there's biochemistry at work; there is a concrete material dimension behind that abstraction of computational descriptions of these processes. Wanting to find some level of additional or separate sensitive matter in the brain is like asking for an ether model; it's a conceptual artefact. While I offer several examples in my book about how this concrete materiality explains perceptual variation and sensation in olfaction, one illustrative case to mention here concerns the impact of genetics on the encoding and processing of odour. Take androstenone, a pig pheromone. To humans (some can perceive it), it smells deeply unpleasant body odour; to others, it smells like urine. Then some people find it pleasant; it smells woody to them while others perceive something floral. That's mind boggling at first: same molecule, completely different qualitative expressions! Now, the key reason behind this phenomenon is not subjective qualia woo-woo. It's measurable genetic differences (the olfactory system is genetically extremely heterogeneous) that lead to variations in receptor sensitivities.

Or think about the effect some drugs have on smell experience. Some drug's side-effects include severe olfactory alterations. Without considering and recognizing the reality of the molecular level, I fear that we only end up chasing pre-scientific philosophical phantoms.

Global SPSP

Ariel Roffé talks to Filippo Contesi[15] about his initiative, called the *Barcelona Principles for a Globally Inclusive Philosophy*[16], which currently have 676 signatories from all parts of the world.

13 - Filippo Contesi[17] is a Beatriu de Pinós Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Barcelona, working in the LOGOS Research Group. Photo (courtesy of Professor Eva Dadlez, Central Oklahoma)

What are the Barcelona Principles?

The Barcelona Principles are a petition to journals, departments, and all sorts of institutions, as well as philosophers, to be more mindful of the disadvantages that non-native speakers have in philosophy, especially in analytic philosophy. I think we should all make an effort to be more inclusive, like some of the sciences already are. So I formulated those five principles with that in mind.

What are the reasons that made you create these principles? Can you tell us about the empirical research behind them?

In 2018 I co-edited a special issue of *Philosophical Papers* on this topic, with my colleague Enrico Terrone, that was called "Linguistic Justice and Analytic Philosophy[18]". In that volume, there is an article by Schwitzgebel et al. One of the things they found was that people writing in a language different from English were citing publications originally written in English a lot, but that the reverse wasn't true. Very few papers written in English cited publications originally written in a different language (just 3% of them did). They also looked at the main affiliation of people on the editorial boards of top analytic philosophy journals, and also found very small percentages of people based in non-Anglophone countries (only 4%).

Then there is also the question about non-native speakers writing in English. That is more difficult to do big numbers on, because it's more difficult to know whether people are native speakers. There might also be disagreements about what even counts as a native speaker. But Moti Mizrahi, from Florida Tech,

[15] https://contesi.wordpress.com/
[16] https://contesi.wordpress.com/bp/
[17] https://contesi.wordpress.com/
[18] https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rppa20/47/1

did some preliminary numbers on this. He found that, at some US institutions, there were much lower percentages of non-native speakers in the philosophy departments, as compared to some of the science departments.

What could explain these differences in the representation of non-native speakers in philosophy as opposed to the sciences?

One reason for sure is the greater importance of natural language in philosophy, as opposed to the greater importance of mathematics and non-linguistic methods in the sciences. My suspicion is that the insistence that analytic philosophy has had on language is another factor. You can see analytic philosophy as beginning with a great interest in language. That's one thing that we have now abandoned to a large extent. A lot of people still call themselves analytic philosophers, but they're not as interested in language as the discipline used to be. However, I think there's too much attention on language that's a carryover from those days.

On this note also, one of the main differentiators between analytic and continental philosophy is supposed to be that analytic philosophy is more science oriented. Trying to be scientific or more akin to the sciences has sometimes translated itself into an obsession with the precision of language, or the appearance of that precision, as if we were doing mathematics. A lot of analytic philosophers have come to treat words and sentences as if they were mathematical equations. So, if you write this slightly different word then it's all wrong. There's a lot of emphasis on typos as well, at least in my experience studying in the UK. So, I think a lot of energy is wasted in confusing rigor with this appearance of rigor (an idea first suggested to me by Giovanni Boniolo).

A third factor is that, in the sciences, at least in physics, academics don't edit journals themselves, they have administrative people who do this (and who, of course, have some background in the relevant disciplines). But in philosophy we still have individual academics who, on top of their full academic load, are supposed to be reading hundreds of submissions and then deciding which to send to referees, and so on. Some editors have admitted in public that in many instances they just look at the first page or two of the submission before deciding what to do with it. Now, that's a problem, because it puts too much pressure on authors to write in an English that's immediately appealing, that catches your attention and that looks professional and erudite. And that very massively disadvantages non-native speakers of English.

Where do you see all of this going from now on?

I don't know. Of the things I've tried, the Barcelona Principles[19] are the first thing that's worked. Hopefully the momentum is going to continue. For example, when I did the special issue, very few people noticed. There's a huge literature on epistemic justice by now, but very little of it is on linguistic justice. I hope there will be more people writing papers on this.

What I'm doing now is building a list of institutions who endorse the Barcelona Principles. For now, we have *Philosophical Psychology*, which is now edited by Lisa Bortolotti at Birmingham. I've also started to contact other institutions, scholarly societies mainly, asking for their endorsement. The plan is to list them on a separate page for institutional endorsements. There's a lot more to be done. In the past, for

[19] https://contesi.wordpress.com/bp/

instance, I tried building a “Society for Non-native Anglophone Philosophers”, it was to be called ‘SNAP’, but without much success. I think that is something that can still be built.

Do you think there is some other way we as individuals can contribute to improving the situation?

I think a lot of people can do a little bit in in their scholarly interactions. To give you an example, I am on the editorial board of a journal. I asked that there be explicit mention, in the instructions for referees, that they not give undue weight to the quality of the prose of the submissions. When I organize things like talks or conferences, I try and make sure that I invite, to the extent that it's possible, a diversity of people with different native languages.

If you’d like to contribute to the work I’ve been doing, I’m also very happy to accept help. So far, I've mostly been on my own. I’ve tried to do the best I can with the limited time that I have. I don't do this as my major research area, and I am not in a continuing academic position. So I always welcome proposals for collaboration on these endeavours.

Even though people have worked on these issues before, I think now may be the first time they’ve become more massively known. We need to use the current momentum to build something more long-lasting. We also need to raise much greater awareness. The inclusion of people who speak different languages and therefore are familiar with different cultures and ways of seeing the world can be massively advantageous for the discipline.

The Proust Questionnaire

Saana Jukola talks to Erik Weber

14 - Erik Weber[20] is Professor of Philosophy at University of Ghent

Who are your favourite heroes or heroines? In real life or in fiction.

There are a few novelists whom I really admire, though I would not call them 'heroes'. These include Stephen Fry, Ian McEwan and the Dutch writer Herman Koch. I admire them because I enjoyed reading (almost) all of their books. In philosophy of science, I admire people like Philipp Kitcher, who published *The Nature of Mathematical Knowledge* in 1984, then became influential in the philosophy of explanation in the 1990s and published *Science, Truth and Democracy* in 2001.

Which words or phrases do you overuse?

I did a small survey among collaborators. I use the phrase 'I mean' a lot (also in Dutch: 'ik bedoel').

What is your favourite food?

[20] https://research.flw.ugent.be/en/erik.weber

I don't really have a favourite dish. When I have visitors from abroad at the university I usually take them out to a restaurant that has excellent typically Belgian food. Then I eat 'Gentse Stoverij' or 'Konijn op Grootmoeders Wijze'.

What is the most critical academic or non-academic feedback you ever received?

Often it is difficult to take so-called critical feedback from reviewers seriously, because it is obvious that they did not read the paper carefully or mistake take their own particular intuitions for arguments. Sometimes this is hilarious. At some point a reviewer told me that what I had done in one of my previously published papers was much more sophisticated than what I presented in the paper under review. That published paper was hardly relevant for the argument in the paper under review.

I also remember a case were a reviewer complained that I was using Paul Humphreys' rather old account of scientific explanation (from his 1989 book) while I only borrowed two concepts from Humphreys without adopting his account (and made that very clear).

Where do you write your best work?

In my office at home. I write all my philosophical work there. I use my office at the university only for other tasks. I have a habit of working at home on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and concentrate on research on these days.

What is your favourite entertainment?

I use my sailing boat as much as possible from May till the end of October. In the winter I read a lot of novels. I also run 2 or 3 times a week in the evening, but that is more relaxation than entertainment (if the running is intense enough, you automatically stop thinking).

What profession would you like to attempt besides your own?

I would like to write a novel, not because I think that I am good at it but because it seems fun to write something without arguing and without worrying about correctness.

What is your greatest achievement?

I leave that for others to judge, I will mention two achievements that I am very happy with. First, I have supervised almost 20 Ph.D. students, and I enjoyed that very much. Second, I have written on causation and explanation in many divergent disciplines (mathematics, physics, biology, historiography, political science, ….). That was sometimes difficult, but also a wonderful experience.

What is your most treasured possession?

I guess my boat, because of the answer to then next question.

Where were or are you happiest?

On my sailing boat, during a 5 or 6 weeks long summer holiday.

SPSP2022: Call for papers


JUL
M T W T F S S

Society for Philosophy of Science in Practice (SPSP) Ninth Biennial Conference[21]

2–4 July 2022 (pre-conference workshop on 1 July)

Ghent University, BELGIUM

On-line submission site for paper or session proposals

https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=spsp2022[22]

Abstract submission deadline: 1 February 2022

Notification of acceptance: 1 March 2022

Main Contact: Alan C. Love, aclove@umn.edu[23]

- Individual paper proposals must include a title and an abstract of 500 words, and full affiliation details and contact information for the author(s)/speaker(s).
- Session/symposia proposals must include an overall title for the session, a 250-500 word abstract of the session, and a 500-word abstract for each paper (or an equivalent amount of depth and detail, if the format of the proposed session is a less traditional one), and full affiliation details and contact information for each contributor. Session proposals should be submitted as a group by the organizer of the session; typically, 3 standard length or 4 shorter papers can be accommodated within our usual session formats.
- We also welcome less traditional formats, including panel discussions and author-meet-critics sessions, as long as they explicitly target a broad issue or specific idea as the core of the discussion (rather than ad hominem arguments), are firmly committed to collegial and non-adversarial exchange, and explain why that issue or idea is relevant to SPSP interests.

Individuals should only appear on the program once as presenters, and at most one additional time as commentator or co-author. If in doubt, please contact the organizers in advance about your anticipated submissions.

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[21] https://www.philosophy-science-practice.org/events/spsp2022-ghent

[22] https://eur02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Feasychair.org%2Fconferences%2F%3Fconf%3Dspsp2022&data=04|01|sara.green%40ind.ku.dk|88997554970c484ccdcb08d9b8864290|a3927f91cda14696af898c9f1ceffa91|0|0|637743710104635829|Unknown|TWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D|3000&sdata=xH3PR2NoPaRIO8FGJp7WiqC%2BjwHvykh8kJxBFRR%2B4HU%3D&reserved=0

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We wish you a wonderful Christmas break!

https://youtu.be/2tk9wuADoxA