

## **Second Biennial Conference of the Society for Philosophy of Science in Practice (University of Minnesota, 18–20 June 2009)**

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The Society for Philosophy of Science in Practice (SPSP) held its second biennial conference at the University of Minnesota on 18–20 June 2009, with superb local organization by Douglas Allchin. SPSP was founded in 2006 by an international group of scholars with the mission of encouraging work in the philosophy of science focused on the study of scientific practice and the role of science in practical realms of life. SPSP welcomes participation not only from professional philosophers and other science-studies scholars with practice-oriented concerns, but also from philosophically concerned practitioners in science, engineering, medicine and other technical fields.

The inaugural SPSP conference was held in 2007 at the University of Twente (in Enschede, The Netherlands) under Mieke Boon's direction. The third biennial conference will be hosted by the University of Exeter in England in 2011, with Sabina Leonelli, Staffan Müller-Wille and John Dupré taking the lead. There will be a call in 2011 for bids to host the fourth conference in 2013, with a preference for North American locations other things being equal.

The 2009 meeting in Minnesota, as with the Twente meeting, featured a high-quality program with a very healthy degree of diversity in the topics and approaches represented.

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There were around 90 contributed papers comprising 30 themed sessions. Participants came from home institutions in a number of countries including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, France, the Netherlands, Australia, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, Finland, Germany and Sweden. At both the Twente and Minnesota conferences many participants remarked on the high degree of conviviality and cooperative spirit that they experienced, in contrast to the competitive and aggressive style of debate often seen at philosophy conferences. There was a good representation of graduate students and junior scholars as well as many well-known figures in the field, and also a notably strong representation of women (49 out of 95 presenters).

Among the great variety of topics discussed at the Minnesota conference, there was a strong representation of the following: the nature of experimental practices and reasoning, modelling, the methodology and ethics of medical research and practice, the social dynamics of research, political and policy issues in science, pluralism, and the place of history and philosophy of science in science teaching. Generally there was a widespread awareness and discussion of the presence of ethical and political values in scientific work. Many papers engaged deeply with the history or the contemporary practice of the sciences.

The SPSP conference was held in parallel with the workshop for science teachers on “Teaching Science through History”, also organized by Douglas Allchin. There were two joint sessions between the two meetings, and the participants in the teachers’ workshop were also invited to attend any other SPSP sessions that were of interest to them. There was a fruitful engagement on various points, which we hope will continue. One striking point was a perceived gulf between what the professional philosophers considered up-to-date in philosophy of science, and what the educational establishment expected science teachers to convey to students regarding the “nature of science” (NOS). It was generally agreed that this gulf could only be bridged by a more active collaboration between the two groups.

Aside from contributed papers and sessions, there were two invited keynote lectures. Prof. Mary Morgan of the London School of Economics gave the opening address on “Facts in Practice—The Lives of Facts”. This was largely a report of key insights arising from the collaborative research project she has led on “How Well Do Facts Travel?” at the LSE. Prof. Morgan challenged the audience to consider whether philosophy of science has been “cutting science at its joints” in its treatment of scientific facts. She pointed to the usual neglect of the use of facts, in contrast to the significant attention paid in recent science studies to the process of fact-production. She also gave a critique of the notions of facts in the works of Bruno Latour and Ludwig Fleck, and proposed instead that facts are more like “squishy balls” that become transformed in interesting and subtle ways in the process of transmission and use in different contexts. Prof. Helen Longino of Stanford University closed the conference with a lecture on “Pluralism and Practice: Thinking about Behavioral Research”. Much of the concrete substance of this lecture was a further development of her paper in the excellent collection on *Scientific Pluralism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), which she co-edited with Stephen Kellert and C. Kenneth Waters. She advanced the argument that in the behavioural sciences the multiplicity of relevant causal factors, which cannot all be measured and modelled simultaneously, demands a selection of factors to focus on. Such necessity of selection means that there are a variety of research approaches which are all valid, for different purposes. She made the additional point that this pluralism needs to be supplemented by pragmatism, in order to determine appropriate courses of action.

The texts of many of the papers presented at the conference are available in the PhilSci Archive online:

<http://philsci-archive.pitt.edu/view/confandvol/2009spspsfposipminj18202009.html>.

A selection of papers has been submitted to the newly founded *European Journal for Philosophy of Science*, with the proposal to form a special issue of the journal. For further details on SPSP and notices of forthcoming events, see <http://www.gw.utwente.nl/spsp/>.

SPSP also operates an e-mail list, which can be joined via the website.