



Philosophy and Psychiatry

June 2021

Introduction

Welcome to the latest edition of the Philosophy SIG newsletter. Undoubtedly this year has been a year to remember. While change is in the order of the day, it feels that the events of last year will have a profound and lasting impact in the way we live and practice. Faithful to this trend, this edition of the Newsletter is marked by a significant change. I am really sorry to announce that Dr Abdi Sanati, who has been the editor of this newsletter for the last 10 years has decided to step down from this role. His “Reflection on a decade of Philosophy SIG Newsletter” is his farewell message to all of us and an invitation for the younger generation to get involved with Philosophy of Psychiatry SIG. I am deeply grateful to Dr Sanati for his support and encouragement to get involved with the Newsletter and the SIG. I hope to be able to follow his path and share with you a newsletter that will be engaging and informative.

It has been almost 2 years since our last conference. With the Exec Board we agreed to organize our next event on **15/09/2021**. The title of the conference will be **“Implicit bias in psychiatric practice; what lessons can philosophy offer to practitioners, learners and educators”**. We look forward to offering an exciting program that will serve as a source of reflection that will assist participants in understanding in depth factors that shape their practice and how to improve it. You will find the Call for Presentations in this newsletter.

For all those who will attend the International Conference of the Royal College, please feel free to contact me during the proceedings. It will be nice to meet you virtually, answer any questions you may have and hear to your suggestions.

Philosophy SIG Website

For further details concerning the Philosophy SIG, please see our website:

<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/college/specialinterestgroups.aspx>

Remember also to check the website of the *International Network for Philosophy and Psychiatry*: <http://www.inpponline.org/>

Philosophy SIG Newsletter

Remember to send any news about developments in connection with the philosophy of psychiatry in your area. Also, consider sending reports on conferences or book reviews. Any contributions would be most welcome!

There is a new email dedicated to the Philosophy SIG where you can send any of your suggestions, reviews, or other communications. The email is philosophysig@gmail.com

Anastasios Dimopoulos

Reflections on a decade of Philosophy SIG newsletter

This year is exactly 10 years from when I took over the role of the editor of the Philosophy SIG newsletter, jointly with my colleague Dr Steve Ramplin, from Dr Julian Hughes. Dr Hughes was a hard act to follow, and we had to up our game to be worthy successors to such a learned scholar. And after 10 years I think it is time for me to step down and leave the scene for the younger generation. One of the famous poets in my native tongue, Persian, Hafez has a poem whereby he says: when you grew old Hafez, it is time to leave the wine house. After 10 years as editor, and passing the age of 50, I think the verse applies to me more than before.

During the last 10 years, we had highs and lows and at times it was not easy to find material to fill the pages, something Professor Bill Fulford had warned me about. Nevertheless, it was never a boring task. I remember that for our first newsletter we published an article by an eminent neuropsychiatrist who suggested that Wittgenstein might have suffered from Asperger's Syndrome. I have to admit I did not expect the furore that article generated, which was in a way something positive as it showed that people actually read the newsletter. We had several exchanges over this topic for two years before finally we put the subject to rest! Other memorable moment was receiving an email from an author, who is a celebrated philosopher, commending the review of his book. The review was to some degrees critical. The response, nonetheless, provide us with a positive feedback on our work.

I wish to extend my gratitude to Dr Hughes, who trusted me with the newsletter; Dr Fulford for his encouragement; Dr Ramplin, without whom I could not have managed this task and all the contributors to the newsletter, most of all the staff at the Royal College of Psychiatrists. I also wish the best fortune for Dr Dimopoulos who is taking this newsletter to new heights in the future.

Dr Abdi Sanati

UPCOMING EVENTS

Philosophy SIG of the Royal College of Psychiatry Conference

We are happy to announce our forthcoming conference for **15/09/2021**. The title of the conference is **Implicit bias in Psychiatric Practice; What lessons can philosophy offer to practitioners, learners, and educators?** We are confident that will offer you an exciting program with plenty of opportunities to enhance reflective practice. The Event will be soon advertised in the Royal College Website. Please find here the Call for Presentations. We will be delighted to receive your abstract.

Implicit bias in psychiatric practice; What lessons can philosophy offer to practitioners, learners, and educators?

Implicit bias is a growing area of interest in modern healthcare. The rising awareness of its role in modern practice is related to the acknowledgement of health inequalities that are partly dependent on the difficulty to tackle its presence. As a phenomenon it has been shown to be pervasive and to exist independently of the values and beliefs of individuals, thus raising important questions of philosophical interest. For a discipline like psychiatry this is even more relevant since its theory is pregnant with conceptual challenges, that in combination with the constraints of everyday practice, implicitly shape the reflective and ethical deliberations of practitioners.

The Philosophy Special Interest Group of the Royal College of Psychiatry invites papers for their annual conference that will explore philosophical contributions on how Implicit Bias impacts psychiatric practice and considerations on how to approach it in medical education in mental health. We seek presentations that address topics including but not limited to:

- Philosophical perspectives on the phenomenon of implicit bias
- Implicit bias, learning and moral cognition
- Cultural and organizational factors that shape implicit biases in psychiatric practice
- Philosophical perspectives on the presence of stereotypes and prejudices in psychiatric practice
- The epistemic impact of implicit bias in the practitioner's everyday life
- Implicit bias, Intuitive judgments, and clinical expertise
- Decision making, moral responsibility and Implicit bias
- Empathy and implicit bias in psychiatric practice
- Philosophical contributions on implicit bias to consider for learners and educators involved in medical education in mental health.

The conference will be held online via Zoom on **15/09/2021**. We are seeking presentations of approximately 20 minutes in length, with 10 minutes of discussion time. If you would like to be considered for a presentation, please submit an abstract of up to 300 words and a short bio with your affiliation at philosophysig@gmail.com. Deadline for submissions is on **07/07/2021 at midnight**. We will provide feedback on the submission made. The final program will be advertised in the second half of July.

As always, the INPP website offers updates on meetings that will take place in the following months.

Loneliness: A Discussion in Philosophy and Psychology
July 13 – 15, 2021

Loneliness is thought to be one of the most important public health problems of our times. The current viral pandemic has exacerbated further what already was a grave concern; not accidentally, the physical and mental isolation experienced by many over the course of the past year is sometimes described as a “loneliness epidemic”. Many publications, initiatives, and research projects in various disciplines are investigating the causes of loneliness and its potential remedies. But despite all this activity, our understanding of loneliness remains incomplete.

For one thing, there is no widely accepted characterization or definition of it that would not raise more questions than it answers. Most such definitions work with some variation of the “perceived absence of others”, or “a feeling of being isolated”. But what is such a “perceived absence”, and how do we explain it? Is loneliness appropriately thought of as a feeling (or perhaps an emotion)? If we think of it in terms of an experience, is it akin to (or literally) a kind of pain; or is it more like a kind of perception, something that constitutively involves an intentional object?

Then there are large questions about the roots of loneliness, however you care to think about it. Current psychological work tends to think of loneliness as being produced by causes of a social or psychological kind; reasonably so, if the aim is to find a remedy for the condition. But it will be useful to ask whether loneliness can only be thought of in this way. You could, for instance, conceive it metaphysically, as something that is a necessary aspect of the human condition, and thus as quite distinct from an effect brought about by psychological or environmental factors. Or you might suspect that the current focus on loneliness in public discourse is not actually all that useful; that it glosses over and thus simplifies what really is a much more nuanced picture than the discussion allows.

Finally, loneliness provokes a range of ethical questions. Some of these arise in moral psychology: they have to do with the influence of loneliness and isolation on moral identity. Others are of a more applied nature: if, as psychologists and medical researchers tell us, loneliness makes us ill, what moral obligations (if any) arise from this fact, and for whom? Do governments or corporations incur a moral duty to protect citizens, workers, or customers from social isolation?

The conference aims to shed light on these and related questions from the perspectives of philosophy and psychology. Whilst psychology has been very active in its discussion of loneliness, its causes and potential remedies, philosophy has

recently made comparatively few contributions to the topic. This is surprising: the discipline should have much to contribute to a discussion about the concept of loneliness, its metaphysics, phenomenology, and ethics. Just as philosophical thinking about loneliness should take seriously psychological research, so empirical work will benefit from the kind of conceptual investigation philosophy can offer. The conference thus aims to facilitate a mutually fruitful dialogue about a concept that is as currently ubiquitous as it remains perplexing.

<https://www.lonelinessphilpsych.org/>

Too Mad to be True

International Conference on the Philosophy of Madness and the Madness of Philosophy

September, 23-24, 2021, Ghent, [Dr. Guislain Museum](#)

Conference Announcement & Call for Abstracts

What can philosophy do for madness? And is there something madness can do for philosophy? Is philosophy more than a mere intellectual activity? Does it ever leave its armchair and effectively transgress the limit with madness? And if so, when, and where could the two possibly meet?

Such questions form the broad scope of the conference on philosophy and madness that will take place in September 2021 in Ghent, Belgium. In recent years, international interest for similar questions has grown considerably, as is demonstrated by the flourishing of journals like [Philosophy, Psychiatry, Psychology](#), and the book series [International Perspectives on Philosophy and Psychiatry](#) by Oxford University Press. Central themes within this momentum are the current renaissance of phenomenological psychopathology, the renewed value and meaning of the first-person perspective in philosophy and psychiatry, the growing contributions to this subject from the analytic philosophical tradition, neo-psychoanalytic thought, and the philosophically-oriented cognitive neurosciences.

Moreover, in December 2020 Wouter Kusters' seminal work [A Philosophy of Madness. The Experience of Psychotic Thinking \(MIT Press\)](#) was published, which was the direct occasion to organize this event. In addition to more strictly academic and clinical questions, this work also provokes discussion about where philosophy and madness interfere. This discussion may be expressed in the following more general considerations: what is the meaning, source and purpose of (human) life? How do the ineffable, the void and infinity relate in religious and psychotic experience? How and when do language and experience intertwine and part from each other? What role do concepts like time, space, reality and modality play in assessments of variations in (human) experience? How are normative presuppositions built in into psychiatric practice and philosophical theory?

The conference sets out to develop these questions by inviting several renowned key note speakers and papers in parallel sessions, aimed at providing high-level discussions of conceptual, clinical, philosophical and psychological issues

related to the overall themes of our conference. Our objective is to enhance the development of the cross-field between philosophy, madness and psychiatry and to demonstrate how this can contribute to deepening our understanding of both psychopathological and so-called ‘normal’ experience – including the central and aberrant experiences and practices of religious life and metaphysical speculation. By explicitly encouraging to bring forward the meaning of lived experience with psychosis, we aim to take madness out of its status as a silenced and passive object of philosophical and psychopathological inquiry, and to bring it back into the communal space of shared philosophical discussion as a subject that speaks for itself, a living voice, and a meaningful experience.

The conference consists of two days of invited key note lectures, followed by parallel paper sessions, as well as a mini-symposium within the conference in which the invited key notes will offer discussions of Wouter Kusters’ A Philosophy of Madness.

You can find more information in the INPP website at <http://inpponline.com/too-mad-to-be-true/>

and

<https://www.psychiatrieenfilosofie.nl/too-mad-to-be-true>

BOOK REVIEWS

Notes on Bryan Magee’s Popper

In my time as a psychiatrist and an amateur philosopher, if I may call myself that, I have encountered numerous references to three philosophers with the same first name, Karl. They are Jaspers, Marx and Popper. And interestingly on the significant majority of occasions when I asked the persons who had made the reference, sometimes in an invasive way I admit, they had not read the original works of the authors. Well, I have not read Marx and am not sure I ever will. However, as someone who has read Jaspers I can attest that he was misquoted in the majority of cases. I remember in the conference for Jaspers’ General Psychopathology’s centenary, the chair of the conference, Dr Anthony Fry, told the audience that in 95% of occasions Jaspers has been misquoted. While I cannot give an exact number, I suspect the same for the third Karl, Popper. I bought Bryan Magee’s book on Popper from a second-hand bookseller very cheap. I have been a fan of Bryan Magee since I got the Persian translation of his book *The Great Philosophers* almost thirty years ago. His book on Popper, while very short, is excellently written, very informative and easy to read. There are some interesting points in the book. Magee discusses Popper’s dislike of “what is..?” questions. To him they only give us sterile analysis and verbalism. As someone who has engaged for several years with questions such as ‘what is mental disorder’ I can see his point. I also liked the point he made on the role of science as mainly solving problems. This reminded me of a conversation I had with an American maths professor with a PhD of the University of Berkley. He disagreed with the

mathematicians whose aim was to provide grand theories. He opined that search for great theories of everything is more of a religious endeavour than a scientific one, and went on to praise the British tendency to ignore great theories and focus on solving problems (I leave the judgement on whether he was right in his assessment of the British to the reader). Popper's emphasis on creativity in science is another area Magee explores with eloquence.

I immensely enjoyed reading the book, which is a huge plus especially in the time of lockdown.

Dr Abdi Sanati

What Can Philosophy Teach Us About Being A Better Leader
Alison Reynolds, Dominic Houlder, Jules Goddard, David Lewis.
Kogan Page, London, 2020.

Many years ago, I attended a course on leadership for higher trainees, provided by the Kings Fund. The course was open to all medical specialties but interestingly, half of the attendees were psychiatric trainees. The talks of leadership and management have become some kind of a fad in psychiatry and while some are attracted to them, many are put off by them (I acknowledge that this is based on my personal experience). I always wondered if leadership has been subjected to philosophical review. I found some conceptual review of leadership in Keith Grint's Oxford's A Very Short Introduction Series, which as evident by the title, was short. The current book focuses exclusively on philosophy and leadership. The authors, collectively have several years of experience in leadership and its scholarship. They are also philosophically trained (the book is dedicated to the authors' tutor, the late Sir Roger Scruton, whom I admit is one of my favourites). The authors emphasise the importance of philosophy in leadership, in addition to economics and psychology. Whilst economics tells us how to deliver the goods, and psychology tells us how to feel good, philosophy tells us what is good for us.

The book starts with Karl Marx and how he described the alienation at workplace. What he described is still relevant in the current state of health services. The authors present Marx as an excellent diagnostician who could identify signs of alienation in his time. They then use work of different philosopher to describe how to have a more humane place of work and the role leaders play in it. In the process, they debunk some of the notions that are common in discussions over leadership. The philosophers discussed are from different eras and include Aristotle, Nietzsche, Popper, Plutarch, Kant and Berlin. There is an emphasis on how the leaders should help the employees to flourish in the workplace, which in turn would reduce the alienation. The discussions in the book are not purely theoretical. Given the authors' experience in the world of business, there are references to how businesses and markets work. The good thing is that one does not need to be initiated in the business world to understand and enjoy this book. Nevertheless, I found how ignorant I was when it comes to the world of business and how complicated it is. There are several anecdotes from the courses the authors' have run and meetings they have attended to. I enjoyed the way they showed the vacuity of using the jargon that has become prevalent in meetings. There are important messages in the book. Using Hobbs' philosophy, the authors argue that the leaders should see authority as a gift and not as a birth right. I have personally been in organisations where the leaders confused being a leader with being a ruler. I remember being admonished by one particular CEO for

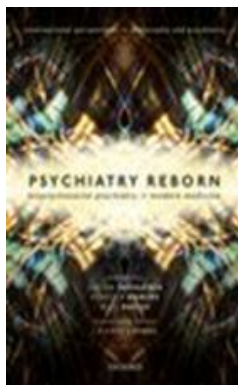
suggesting the consultants should have a role in appointment of the medical director (I was told brusquely that I could not appoint my boss, he was the one who would do so)!

Given the importance of leadership, I think it is important for philosopher to have more input in this area. Granted that it entails a move from the interesting world of abstractions to the messy real world, but as this book shows, there is a lot philosophy has to offer in this area.

Dr Abdi Sanati

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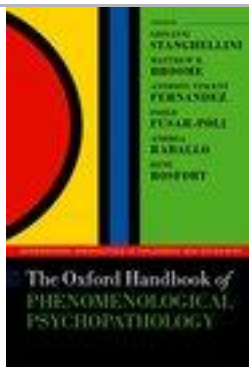
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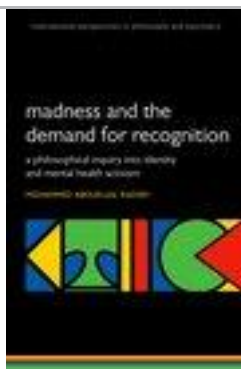
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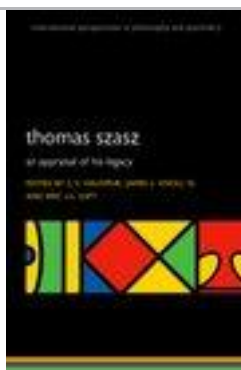
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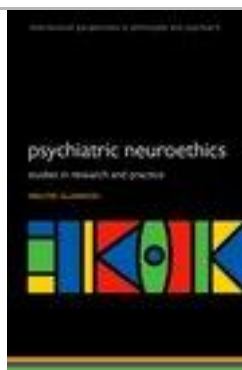
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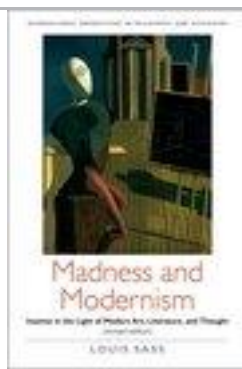
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