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Invited Session

Reframing the Historiography of Philosophy: A Dialectic Approach

Chair: Marcelo Dascal (Tel Aviv); Co-Chair: Tomás Calvo Martínez (Madrid)

Participants in alphabetical order: Tomas Calvo Martinez (Madrid), Han-liang Chang (Taipei), Marcelo Dascal (Tel Aviv), Ofer Gal (Sidney), Jonathan Israel (Princeton), Anna Carolina Regner (Porto Alegre), Yaron Senderowicz (Tel Aviv).

Available Titles and Abstracts:

Tomas Calvo Martinez, **Dialectics and the History of Platonism**

“Dialectics” is one of the most controversial notions in Plato's thought, in so far as it refers to (at least) *two different conceptions of philosophy*. On the one hand, dialectics is related to dialogue, to alive discussion. On the other hand, dialectics is taken to be the highest kind of episteme, a kind of knowledge which is intended to be both universal and absolute. This dual conception of dialectics generates an *internal conflict* within Platonism. Whereas dialectics as dialogue tends to picture philosophy as an *always open and never ending activity*, its conception as the highest knowledge seems to imply the possibility to build up a *close and definitive philosophical system*.

The history of Platonism develops as a confrontation between these two conflicting conceptions of philosophy, in ancient times as well as in our days. In ancient times, Arcesilaos and the New Academy interpreted philosophy as an unending critical discussion, while the systematic point of view was carried out by Plotinus and Neoplatonism. In our days we find almost the same quarrel between those who (like Gadamer) interpret Plato's dialectics as an unending search for truth, and those who (like the Tübingen School) try to find a system in Plato's doctrines beyond the written dialogues.

Han-liang Chang, **On the Birth of Historiography of Philosophy in China**

Postulating “the historiography of philosophy” in the Chinese context creates special difficulties. One’s first task is to clarify the complicated issue of name and substance. It is generally agreed that *philosophy* is a loaned word, directly from Japan and indirectly from the West. Therefore, talking about Chinese philosophy begs the question of knowledge systems’ cross-cultural dissemination and mutations. Writing a history of philosophy in China involves the following tasks: (1) accounting for the approximation of two (or more than two) systems of thought; (2) offering a history of the approximation; (3) historicizing the “presentist” approximation. And the tasks are always registered in three temporal coordinates: (1) the moment of enunciation (of the historiographer); (2) the moment of the enunciated (i.e., Chinese materials in the historical perspective); and (3) the moment of approximation (or *rapprochement* of the approximated and the approximating systems). Based on these assumptions, the

paper comments on the two earlier histories of Chinese philosophy (by You-lan Feng and Shih Hu (Hu Shi), first decades of the 20th century) and interprets their approximations in terms of cross-cultural dialectics.

Marcelo Dascal, **Philosophical Innovation and Controversy: The Emergence of Hybrid Concepts**

A bird's eye view of the history of philosophy offers a puzzling picture. Side by side one can watch both, the dynamic agitation of ceaseless dialectical clashes between competing ideas, systems, schools, each demolishing pitilessly the other's intuitions, theories, basic assumptions, and the peaceful dialogue of cooperative minds continuously discussing perennial questions and attempting to solve unchangeable problems. Against this background, it is difficult to conceive what might count as philosophical innovation and the question must be raised, is innovation in philosophy at all possible? And if it is, how radical can it be and what are its conditions of possibility? In this paper I want to argue that controversies, conceived neither as scientific discussions nor as eristic disputes, constitute an essential condition of possibility for philosophical innovation. Among the consequences of this claim for the historiography of philosophy, I will focus on the emergence of 'hybrid concepts' as means of resolution of philosophical controversies involving clashes between different conceptual frameworks. These concepts emerge as mediators between conflicting positions by combining some (but not all) features of their component concepts. However, since neither of the conflicting conceptual frameworks to which these components belong is sufficient to fully characterize a hybrid concept, it must emerge with a certain amount of indefiniteness, which is progressively reduced as it develops within the new conceptual framework it helps, dialectically, to shape. Examples of philosophical innovation of this kind in the work of Leibniz will be analyzed.

Ofer Gal and Raz Chen, **The Wig and the Instrument: Radical Instrumentalism from Galileo to Hooke**

In his famous *Assayer* Galileo ignores the Jesuits' explicit support of his telescope and uses a particularly forceful rhetoric to assault their use and understanding of the instrument and its use. Galileo's arguments have nothing to do with Copernicanism or Platonism, and they force him to adopt strangely reactionary positions about comets. Rather, they support a new, radical concept of instrumental observation, in which the instrument completely replaces the eye. To justify this Galileo presents the human sense organ as a fundamentally flawed instrument, whose mediation distorts and deceives, and the instrument, in contrast, as an embodiment of a purely mathematical relation, which allows the intellect to read the "mathematical characters" of nature unmediated. The Jesuits, on the other hand, approached observation instruments as aids to or extensions of the eye, with the human organ, divinely assigned, being always the final adjudicator, and naked eye observation always the preferred choice. The controversy between mild and radical instrumentalism continued throughout the 17th century, with its original themes still present, in an elaborate form, in the debate over telescopic sights between Hooke and Hevelius in the 1670s.

Jonathan Israel, **Spinoza versus Locke in the Controversies of the Later French Enlightenment (1760-1789)**

Most survey accounts of the Enlightenment see Locke as being far more important than Spinoza as a general inspiration for the French Enlightenment thinkers. However, this commonplace view seems to have no real foundation. Whereas the major atheistic-materialists, Diderot, Helvetius and d'Holbach say almost nothing about Locke or Spinoza, they were regularly accused, with considerable justification, of 'rehashing' Spinoza. Conversely, the great Deist, Voltaire, claimed to be a disciple of Locke and opponent of Spinoza. Nevertheless, in his later work he has practically nothing to say about Locke other than repeating old clichés and is clearly far more concerned, indeed clearly obsessed, with debating the complexities of Spinoza.

Anna Carolina Regner, **On Darwin's Philosophical Controversies**

The celebrated "natural philosopher" Charles Darwin was not a professional epistemologist, a method theorist, or a metaphysician. However, the development and defense of his theory of natural selection involved fundamental debates concerning epistemological, methodological and metaphysical issues. Some of these debates took place with a range of opponents at different levels and in different contexts. Other debates did not actually occur, but they can be (re)constructed by focusing on Darwin's ideas and on those of the thinkers who had a polemical influence on him. In this talk, I will analyze examples of these debates: the controversial positions of Darwin and William Whewell on conceiving "cause" to be inferred from their mutual references, the largely private debate between Darwin and his friend Joseph Hooker on the notion of "evidence", the disparity between Darwin and Thomas Malthus' ideas concerning "nature" (and "human nature"), and finally, the insoluble polemics between Darwin and George Mivart regarding the notion of "science". These examples will also show that polemical debates may have different structures and scope, while playing a fundamental role in clarifying ideas and giving rise to new ones. The "dialectical approach" to be followed in this analysis combines a critical reading of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and *Topics* with some contemporary insights, and, in particular, with Marcelo Dascal's approach to "controversies".

Yaron Senderowicz, **Controversies and the Metaphysics of Mind**

Metaphysics is an old subject. Until the last quarter of the 20th century it was believed to be a dead subject. Yet, the end of the 20th century witnessed a grand revival of metaphysics in analytic philosophy, in particular in the philosophy of mind. What, however, is the nature of the reasons used in justifying metaphysical claims to knowledge? What is the nature of arguments used in this field? In particular, what role do controversies have in prompting epistemic changes? In the present wide-ranging metaphysical inquiries these questions are rarely asked. Usually, the complaint is whether metaphysics could be considered a legitimate field of knowledge, not how knowledge is gained in it. But as the last three decades proved metaphysics *advanced considerably* and the question one needs to revive is *how this advancement is possible*, not *whether it is possible*.

The main assumption of the project to which the present paper belongs is that the evolution of metaphysical claims to knowledge as manifested in current philosophy

of mind is unique. Controversies are crucial for engendering epistemic change in metaphysics in a way that was so far unnoticed by those that practice it. In the present paper my aim will be to revive some old ideas found in Kant's critique of metaphysics and to use them in order to interpret one example of how metaphysical controversies are related to epistemic change in this field. I will first distinguish between Kant's explicit theory of metaphysical controversies in which Kant is engaged as a mere "outside observer" and his implicit standpoint that inextricably involves his own metaphysical innovations. I will then show how Kant's implicit theory could be used in interpreting metaphysical controversies and the type of epistemic change that they involve by showing how it could be used in interpreting the evolution of the controversy regarding Jackson's "knowledge argument".