

Conceivability & Modality June 19-20, 2017, Sapienza University in Rome¹

Problems of modality have been employing metaphysicians for ages. Be it an attempt to provide the best logic of modal claims, truth conditions of such claims, an account of entities these claims are about, or the way we know whether such claims are true or false, the phenomenon is always present. Since the scope of problems the phenomenon reveals, it is not a surprise that conferences dedicated to them were, are and will, be organised. And, as it seems, *Issues on the (Im)Possible* conference found her 'epistemology' sibling: *Conceivability & Modality* conference.

This year, *Conceivability & Modality* was hosted by the Sapienza University in Rome. As the main topics of the conference adumbrated – conceivability & modal epistemology, logic of conceivability and the history of conceivability – together with the list of speakers – Francesco Berto (University of Amsterdam), Albert Casullo (Nebraska), Boris Kment (Princeton), Tito Magri (Sapienza), Antonella Mallozzi (The Graduate Center – CUNY), Daniel Nolan (Notre Dame), Jonathan Schaffer (Rutgers), Tom Schoonen (University of Amsterdam), Anand Vaidya (San Jose State University), Barbara Vetter (Freie Universität Berlin) – the event brought together the most recent debates in modal epistemology.

After a short and warm welcome from Antonella Mallozzi and Tito Magri, the conference commenced with Anand Vaidya's 'Re-Conceiving Conceivability in light of the History of 20th Century Theories of Conceivability'. In it, Vaidya wondered where conceivability theory can go in light of the vast amount of criticism it has received, and aimed to see what lessons we can learn from these criticisms. Daniel Nolan's 'Imaginative Resistance as Parochialism' argued that although using our ability to conceive plays some role in modal epistemology, the keys to modal knowledge need to be sought elsewhere.

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After lunch, Antonella Mallozzi presented such an account of modal epistemology according to which essential properties of individuals (and kinds) are characterised by their causal roles. This ‘Putting Modal Metaphysics First’ approach promises to fit nicely with Kripke’s examples of a posteriori necessities as well as other cases. In her ‘Potential Knowledge’ Barbara Vetter considered different ways in which knowledge of our own abilities and powers, as well as knowledge of the dispositions and tendencies of the objects, can be acquired. The end of the first day belonged to Francesco Berto’s ‘Logic Will Get You from A to B. Imagination Will Take You Everywhere’. Berto proposed a view on imagination as a logically anarchic activity which combines a modal semantics with a mereology of contents.

The second day of the conference started with Tito Magri’s ‘True Humean Modalities’ the aim of which was to address modal Humeanism via the essential commitments of modal Humeanism and, secondly, how these commitments shape the Humean conception of conceivability as a guide to possibility. In his ‘Modal Scepticism and Kung’s Epistemology’, Tom Schoonen critically evaluated Kung’s theory of imagination and suggested that it provides a very weak modal epistemology, unable to account for our knowledge of certain common modal claims.

Al Casullo’s post-lunch talk entitled ‘Modal Empiricism: What is the Problem?’ overviewed Gordon Barnes’s argument on behalf of Kant’s contention that knowledge is a priori. Casullo’s goals were to a) uncover several significant gaps in the argument and b) to show that it suffers from a common defect in rationalist arguments. ‘The Conceivability Test for Possibility’ given by Boris Kment explored the justificatory force of the conceivability test. For him, any application of the conceivability test to establish a modal claim must rest on pre-existing modal beliefs. Finally, Jonathan Schaffer’s view as how ‘To See the Worlds in a Grain of Sand’ had the following form: possibly p_{df} if there is an intrinsic profile F such that the world’s being F ground-entails p ’s being true.

Conceivability & Modality was an extraordinary event. It attracted influential philosophers working on the epistemology of modality as well as made the impression that the research programmes in modal epistemology play indispensable roles in theorising about modality.

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