

A (PRE-)HISTORY OF EPSA

Stathis Psillos
(Former President of EPSA
2007–2009)

The formation of a European forum for the philosophy of science had been something that I had been thinking about since the early 2000s. There had been various informal discussions in conferences in Europe, but the prevailing view seemed to be that actions like this were premature or even unnecessary—given the existence of various national associations and on-going research projects and groups. But the idea persisted, based as it was on the thought that philosophy of science in Europe had grown to be a considerable force of quality and innovation. It was my encounter with Bengt Hansson in Lund in April 2005 that moved things to a different level. Bengt saw very clearly that the creation of a professional association in Europe could act in many beneficial ways. It could foster research collaborations; break national and cultural barriers; help with the integration

of smaller or more isolated philosophy of science communities; give the opportunity to younger researchers to disseminate their work. Above all, having some sort of connection with EU research funding bodies, Bengt saw very clearly that philosophy of science—qua an established intellectual endeavour within the broad camp of Humanities—might need support and defence in the years to come.

In July 2005, Bengt and I circulated an e-mail message to various European philosophers of science (meaning: philosophers of science who worked in European Universities) and tried to make a case for the “establishment of something like a European Society for the Philosophy of Science”, laying emphasis on the need “to make the relevance of philosophy more visible”. As instruments for the development of this Society, we suggested a biennial conference and a society-owned journal. The message ended with a call to an informal meeting proposed to take place during the conference of the European Society of Analytic Philosophy in Lisbon in August 2005. The reaction was

generally enthusiastic, though (to my amazement) there were voices of dissent, or better voices urging the need to proceed very cautiously. The informal meeting did take place in Lisbon on Sunday the 28th of August 2005 with about 30 participants and the consensus was that the time was ripe for a professional philosophy of science association in Europe.

No further action was taken, however, until May 2006, when Henk de Regt, Mauro Dorato, Stephan Hartmann, Berna Kilinc, Miklos Redei, Matti Sintonen, Mauricio Suárez and myself took an initiative to meet at the London School of Economics on the 27th of September of 2006 with the agenda of setting up what was decided to be named: European Philosophy of Science Association (EPSA). In this meeting, a provisional steering committee of EPSA was formed (with the above named 8 philosophers of science plus Maria-Carla Galavotti and Friedrich Stadler), the statutes of EPSA were drafted and the decision for the first EPSA conference was taken. This would take place in Madrid from the 15th to the 17th of November 2007. The

declaration of the London meeting invited all philosophers of science of “join us in this endeavour”. In the early days of October 2006, EPSA was officially registered in Vienna—an act that was meant to be symbolic as well as practical. Matti Sintonen was voted by the founding steering committee as the President of EPSA.

The Call for Papers for the first EPSA conference was announced in February 2007. Mauricio Suárez was appointed Chair of Local Organising Committee and a heavy-weight Programme Committee was led by Mauro Dorato and Miklos Redei. The time until the actual conference was quite short and everybody worked very hard to make the conference the great success it was. EPSA had now had actual members and the first General Assembly meeting took place in Madrid on the 16th of November 2007. During this lively meeting, there was the first election of the officials of EPSA. One of the things that the newly elected Steering Committee discussed was the prospects of an EPSA-led academic journal. Long, and occasionally difficult and tense, discussions and negotiations ensued, but the happy result was the establishment of the European Journal of Philosophy of Science in June 2009, edited by Carl Hoefer (with Mauro Dorato as the

deputy editor). A few months later, in October 2009, the 2nd EPSA conference was held in Amsterdam. The chair of the Local Organising Committee was Henk de Regt and the Programme Committee was led by Stephan Hartmann and Samir Okasha. Also, the new Steering Committee was elected. The second Conference made it clear to everybody that EPSA was here to stay. Within the space of few years, EPSA had gained considerable respect and prestige.

The 3rd EPSA conference will take place in Athens between the 5th and the 8th of October 2011. (See <http://epsa11.phs.uoa.gr>) We very much hope that it will be at least as successful as the previous two conferences. Greece is currently under an enormous financial and economic crisis and the working people and the pensioners of Greece have seen an unprecedented deterioration of their well-being as well as of the welfare state. Worse is forecast to come within 2011. The very nature of the University as a public space of knowledge, research and education might be at stake. The Humanities might well be the first to pay the price of the transformation of universities to super markets of impact-generating knowledge. But the philosophy of science community in Greece is ready to welcome philosophers of science from around the world in Athens in October and to

show how thriving and rich our discipline is. An intellectual cornucopia is not the antidote to financial austerity. But it may well be the key to hoping that a better world is possible.

The European Philosophy of Science Association is genuinely multi-perspectival. It transcends national borders and aims to foster excellence and opportunity. It is here to be the home of all philosophers of science.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR Stathis Psillos is Professor of Philosophy of Science at the University of Athens, Greece. He holds a University Degree in Physics (University of Patras, Greece), MSc degree in History and Philosophy of Science (University of London, Kings College) and a PhD in Philosophy of Science (University of London). He has published on scientific realism, causation, explanation and the history of philosophy of science.

Personal Website: <http://old.phs.uoa.gr/~psillos/>