MindGrad 2024 Conference Report

Table of Contents

Overview

MindGrad 2024: Philosophy of Mind and Psychology took place on the 22nd – 23rd June 2024. The conference was a major success, welcoming over 35 attendees comprised of faculty and students across more than three Warwick departments. The conference's interdisciplinary philosophy of mind theme encouraged a wide range of interesting talks from both historically significant and strongly innovative perspectives. The discussion provided by our respondents and through the Q&A sessions was extremely high quality, often spilling over into lunch and coffee breaks.

We set out to provide a forum for graduate students to share their research and gain valuable feedback, and to make new connections both with researchers working in similar fields, but also across different philosophical disciplines. In this regard we were successful – some of our speakers are already making plans to return to Warwick for future research seminars, and we hope that the connections made last weekend will only grow, in time. This was aided by the very enjoyable conference dinner we were able to provide on the evening of the first day to our speakers thanks to the generous support of our sponsors: the casual atmosphere allowed genuine connections to be made, and provided a less daunting atmosphere to discuss some of the themes which had been brought up over the course of the day. This year MindGrad was an international endeavour: due in large part to our funding support from the HRC we were able to invite graduate speakers from Europe as well as across the United Kingdom, all contributing to cementing Warwick as a world-leading hub for research in the philosophy of mind and related fields.

We were delighted to host Professor Matthew Soteriou from King's College London and Dr. Léa Salje from the University of Leeds as our keynote speakers, as well as Suzuka Komatsu (St. Andrews), Emily Boocock (Warwick), Max Minden Riberio (Lund), Roope Ryymin (KCL), Arturo Vazquez (Southampton) and Damiano Ranzenigo (Konstanz) as our graduate speakers. Responses were given by Warwick faculty for our graduate speakers, and by Warwick graduates for our Keynotes.

A member of Warwick faculty declared it was 'one of the best MindGrads ever', which we are pleased to say was a sentiment shared amongst many. The vibrant atmosphere and compelling discussion was only made possible with the support of the HRC, whom we would like to thank once again for their generous contribution in support of the conference.

Highlights from Papers and discussions

Our major goal for MindGrad2024 was to provide a forum for interdisciplinary thought to develop in the philosophy of mind. In that vein, below are some highlights from speakers who we selected with this mission in mind.

Interdisciplinary philosophy began before lunch on the first day with Emily Boocock's talk: 'Making sense of extremist groups'. The talk used online incel communities as a case study to examine the differences between extremism understood in terms of individuals and in terms of membership in a group. Boocock discussed the psychology of extremist mindsets, and the role that extremist groups play in nurturing these kinds of mindsets especially for individuals who are not yet extremists in the individual sense, leading her to a critique of Quassim Cassam's individual-centred definition of extremism. In his response, Cassam drew contrasts with the government's recent policy advice on classification of extremist groups, and the Q&A led to a discussion of how the understanding of what it means to be part of an extremist group could help shape policy to prevent individuals from becoming radicalised.

In our first Keynote talk, 'Change in Temporal Perspective', Professor Matthew Soteriou turned to history, starting with an argument dating all the way back to the Eleatic philosophers which purported to show that we do not in fact move through time. Soteriou discussed how to avoid this and other related historical 'traps', appealing to our phenomenological experiences and the nature of occurrences to make his arguments. In her response, Eve Poirier linked Soteriou's discussion to the historical tradition of idealism, and suggested that part of his argument could be used to explain the psychology of time seeming to pass at different speeds.

On the second day of the conference, Arturo Vazquez talked about 'Psychological Language and Artificial Patterns of Behaviour'. We began with a famous animation from Heider and Simmel's 1944 experiment which brings out the human tendency to describe completely artificial happenings (in this case the movement of different sized triangles) in anthropomorphising language which seems to suggest we are interpreting entirely artificial behaviour. The video is worth a watch to anyone who hasn't seen it before (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VTNmLt7QX8E) – it really is quite striking how hard it is not to see the events unfold in terms of behaviour, despite knowing that you are just watching the movement of inanimate objects. Vazquez discussed how to make sense of what we mean by sentences like 'the big triangle wanted to hurt the small triangle', which seem to posit intention where we know there is none. Vazquez considered the implications of this for how we interact with LLMs like chat-GTP, and what it could mean to say that the computer 'meant' something. The Q&A took a surprising turn as a connection was pointed out to art: what is going on when we attribute behaviour to fictional characters, and is it the same phenomenon present in the Heider and Simmel experiment? This talk led to some of the most wide-reaching and engaging conversations of the whole conference, with discussion spilling over into lunchtime. Thank you Arturo Vazquez!

We then had our second talk from Dr. Léa Salje, who spoke on 'The creative self-discovery in seeing what I say'. This talk focused on the complex and iterative process by which we try and articulate thoughts, and the puzzle of whether or not we can know what a thought is before we are able to put words to it. Salje critiqued prevalent philosophical and psychological views on

this phenomenon and presented a new position which she will be arguing for in her upcoming monograph.

MindGrad 2024 ended with a talk from Damiano Ranzenigo titled 'Actively Overcoming Existential Distress'. Ranzenigo considered how individuals can overcome existential distress through strongly identifying with a specific meaning or purpose – a topic frequently ignored in contemporary analytic philosophy, meaning his talk pushed the boundaries of the discipline from the outset. The talk appealed to the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals, who facing distress and depression from homophobia can eventually come to find their queer identity as a source of meaning in life, or how those who face existential dread from the overwhelming threat of the climate crisis can overcome this through identifying themselves with their activist struggle. Ranzenigo also discussed historical difficulties with identity and hope, as with Jonathan Lear's study of the western American Crow tribe, who faced the complete erasure of their culture. Ranzenigo suggested that these purposes and identities can serve as a cornerstone on which individuals can rebuild their hope for a comprehensively meaningful life, turning once again to history with an analogy to Descartes' project to build back to knowledge from the starting point of his certainty in his own existence.

Objectives and Outcomes

Our key objectives for the MindGrad 2024 conference were as follows:

1. Provide a forum for graduate students to connect with likeminded researchers, and receive helpful feedback on their research from Warwick faculty.

   Outcome: Success. Several invited speakers mentioned explicitly how helpful they found the feedback from their Respondents and the Q&A sessions. Strong connections were made as mentioned in the overview.

2. Cement Warwick as a world-leading centre for research in philosophy of mind and related fields.

   Outcome: Success. We had over 30 submissions from all over the world, and our selected speakers hailed from all over the UK, with two of our speakers coming from Europe for the conference.

3. Take an interdisciplinary focus.

   Outcome: Success. We aimed to have 50% of talks featuring a psychology element, and 33% of talks featuring a historical element. We exceed our aims with respect to the historical element. Despite the psychology element being present in slightly under 50% of talks, we still feel the overall aim was met for three reasons: firstly, because those talks which did feature a psychology element did so in great detail, secondly, because we also featured other interdisciplinary themes like politics and artificial intelligence, and thirdly because the interdisciplinary talks were some of the best received of the conference, which sets the stage for future editions of MindGrad to encourage a greater interdisciplinary element and build on our progress here.

Poster

22-23
JUNE

MB0.07, MATHEMATICAL
SCIENCES BUILDING
COVENTRY CV4 7AL

**WARWICK
GRADUATE
CONFERENCE
IN PHILOSOPHY
OF MIND**

MINDGRAD2024

**KEYNOTE
SPEAKERS**

**INVITED
SPEAKERS**

**MATTHIEW
SOTERIOU**

KCL

LEA SALJE

University of
Leeds

**EMILY
BOOCOCK**

University of
Warwick

**MINDEN
RIBEIRO**

University of Lund

**ROOPE
RYYMIN**

KCL

**SUZUKA
KOMATSU**

University of
StAndrews

**DOMIANO
RANZENIGO**

University of
Konstanz

**ARTURO
VASQUEZ**

University of
Southa Otón

Registration: Email
lumeng.liu@warwick.ac.uk

THIS CONFERENCE IS SPONSORED BY :

SAP Society for
Applied
Philosophy

WARWICK
Humanities
Research Centre

A
ANALYSIS