

Briefing for ANPOSS/ENPOSS/POSS-RT 2021 Joint Conference

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This international conference was held via Zoom on March 4th-7th, 2021. The venue was Hitotsubashi University in Tokyo, Japan with participants from Europe, North America, and East Asia. The overarching theme was the Philosophy of Social Sciences, with inquiries concerning concepts, theories, methods/methodologies, logic, strategies and so on. There were five keynote addresses and nearly thirty presentations in total. The conference struck me for its intellectual vigor and collaborative spirit. I would like to express my deep gratitude to everybody involved in this conference.

It has been well over a year since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic which has challenged our fundamental values and views concerning the ends of life. Experience of our life has been substantially transformed by the pandemic-induced anxiety and unstable mental conditions. The pandemic has also provided opportunities to reflect and rethink issues such as ‘What is the meaning of life?’ ‘What is well-being?’ ‘What is happiness?’ ‘How should we live?’ ‘What are the ultimate ends of life?’ etc.. Under these circumstances, this international conference was timely and significant in the sense that fundamental questions about society and human behavior were dealt with in an academic setting while addressing issues related to ultimate human concerns.

Some keynote addresses spoke to how neither humans nor societies can be entirely reduced to theories. Prof. Noe, in referring to Kiyoshi Miki’s philosophical account, discussed the role of “imagination” mediating between ‘logos’ and ‘pathos’. In a similar vein, Prof. John Weymark pointed out how Binmore’s “as if” reasoning is related to ‘fictionalism’. In addition, Binmore’s distinction between ‘knowledge-as-commitment’ and ‘knowledge-as-certainty’ leads to his assessment of empathetic preferences as important action-guiding factors; this seemed to point towards how humans do not always make rational choices. In addition, Prof. Anna Carabelli, in explicating the ethics of John Maynard Keynes, pointed out his meaningful distinction between ‘speculative ethics’ and ‘practical ethics’. Practical ethics deals with human conduct, whereas speculative ethics tackles with ultimate values and ends of life concerning questions such as ‘how should we live?’. Prof. Henry Richardson commented on his dissatisfaction about John Rawls’ theory of justice and power which he considered to be mostly legalistic and thus lacking in its consideration of informal social attitudes and norms; he posited

the need for broadening the conception of the theory. Prof. Ian Jarvie, while analyzing Popper's theories, mentioned that the academic discipline of sociology is insufficient in its consideration of politics and he discussed how the social sciences as a socially collaborative achievement, featuring intersubjective and collective testability.

In terms of my personal conclusion from the conference, I felt that in order to think about well-being and the happiness of humans, we must take into consideration unconscious, subconscious, emotional, moral, and ethical dimensions as well as even self-destructive impulses. As the diversity of presentations showed, we should not blindly assume that human desires and behaviors are based on self-interest underpinned by rationality; the methodologies of social sciences encompass diversified approaches such as quantitative, qualitative, descriptive, prescriptive, conceptual, empirical, normative procedures. Discussions have been going on in the social sciences regarding research methodologies and whether general or causal claims can be justified despite many possible factors of uncertainty. It was intriguing to understand possibilities of analysis that do not cling to causal-mechanistic explanations, and the presenters discussed the limits of such explanations and alternative ways to represent reality without failing to reduce its complications. Although at times accounts given from the naturalism/scientism perspective and humanism may seem to compete, the diversity of the presentations revealed how such perspectives need not be considered in terms of binary oppositions.