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# INTRODUCTION: METHODS OF PHILOSOPHY

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A critical examination of its method(s) belongs to the core business of philosophy from its beginnings. In recent discussion, however, metaphilosophical issues have gained an especially prominent role. As a constant flood of publications shows, metaphilosophy and philosophical methodology are among the areas in which the current debates are most lively.<sup>1</sup> The international conference hosted in 2017 by the Faculty of Philosophy of the Università Vita-Salute San Raffaele, and organised by Elisabetta Sacchi, Sarah Songhorian and Stefano Bacin with the support of the research centres CESEP, CRESA, CRISI, DIAPOREIN, GENDER, and PERSONA, aimed at gathering contributions on methodological issues in different fields of current philosophical studies: analytic philosophy, ethics, phenomenology, philosophy and gender issues, and history of ideas. The sections of this issue include most of the papers presented at that conference.

If there is a philosophical perspective that started as an intellectual endeavour based on a revolutionary methodology, which through decades brought original philosophical questions to light, it is analytic philosophy. In this spirit, Timothy Williamson scrutinises the analytic attitude towards testing philosophical theories via a falsificationist methodology. Though still widespread in the analytic community, a falsificationist methodology might be less fruitful and more prone to error than a more flexible alternative brought forward by Williamson, namely the reliance on model-building, carried over into the philosophical debate from empirical and social sciences.

Williamson's contribution is followed by two papers devoted to two methodological divides in the analytic tradition. The first divide, which is a more classical one, concerns whether, in the analysis of core philosophical notions such as the notion of reference of singular terms, a methodological approach in terms of formal theories and their models versus an approach focusing on the analysis of natural language is preferable. This divide informs Francesca Boccuni's contribution.

Bianca Cepollaro's article, on the other hand, concerns the linguistic intuitions connected with the use of certain expressives such as derogatory terms in the light of the second, more recent,

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. the very diverse picture provided by two recent handbooks: Cappelen, Szabó Gendler & Hawthorne (2016) and D'Oro & Overgaard (2017). For a more recent, significant sample of the debate, see Baz 2018, along with the review by Cappelen & Deutsch (2018), and Williamson (2007, 2018).

divide in the analytic tradition: whether the analysis of central philosophical notions should be carried out via a methodology relying exclusively on theoretical investigation (the so-called “armchair philosophy”) or via an experimental approach.

The title of this special issue echoes that of a philosophical masterpiece that put methodological issues in the foreground, thereby marking a perspective that is still very much at the centre of the debate, namely Henry Sidgwick’s *The Methods of Ethics*. Both papers of the section on ethics follow this connection and take their lead from Sidgwick’s views.

Roger Crisp examines Sidgwick’s understanding of ‘method’ and his methodological practice. After considering Sidgwick’s conditions of proper self-evidence of intuitions and some limits in his assessment of ‘dogmatic intuitionism’, Crisp suggests in this light a more constructive debate between advocates of different normative theories as a methodological guideline in moral philosophy.

Massimo Reichlin points out an issue in Sidgwick’s talk of a method of ethics that still affects current debates. Reichlin argues that Sidgwick’s construal of the three methods of ethics yields an infelicitous confusion between methods and normative theories of morality, which has in turn brought a consequentialist bias in the debates of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

In the first paper devoted to aspects of the phenomenological approach, Dermot Moran underscores the holistic nature of phenomenology. Moran examines the main features of phenomenology, characterising it as a philosophical method that, in opposition to objectivist naturalism, grounds on an investigation of the a priori relations between subjectivity and the different domains of objectivity.

Sara Heinämaa investigates a Husserlian distinction between two ways of understanding other persons, their motivations and actions: the empirical way and the genuinely intuitive way, crucially grounded, according to Heinämaa’s interpretation of Husserl, on self-understanding. Both self-understanding and understanding of others enable ethical reflections, self-shaping and judgements on others, by being not confined to the actual but by opening to the possibilities of change and renewal.

Roberta Lanfredini compares phenomenological empiricism with classical empiricism, on the one hand, and logical empiricism, on the other. She argues that phenomenology is a kind of radical, though not reductionist, empiricism that is to be assimilated neither to the first strain of empiricism nor to the second.

Roberta De Monticelli tackles some traditional philosophical issues revolving around the notion of value. She proposes a phenomenological answer in terms of Scheler’s material axiology to the vexed questions concerning the cultural versus the universal source of values and the truth and falsehood of value judgements. This proposal is spelled out in terms of a clarification of the bottom-up phenomenological approach, which De Monticelli supports via experimental phenomenology.

The fourth section of the volume is devoted to the debate concerning some philosophical considerations regarding gender issues, which have now established not merely as an object of philosophical analysis, but as a topic of metaphilosophical significance. This is fittingly illustrated in Marina Sbisà’s paper, which investigates several ways in which the discourse on gender can be tackled philosophically, examines the difficulties and limitations of each of them and proposes a consideration of gendered subjectivity in intersubjective relations understood as a basic process in human life.

Laura Caponetto focuses on the role that feminist philosophy of language has ascribed to Austin’s theory of speech acts to account for the notion of silencing in the debate on

pornography and censorship. The article's aim is to discuss Austin's theory in order to unveil a form of discourse injustice that has been largely undernoticed.

The final section gathers papers that do not directly address methodological issues, but exemplify a historical-critical approach. The paper included in this section revolve around two foci: central aspects of Descartes' epistemology and their reception in Spinoza, and the current debate on the so-called "Italian Theory".

In the first group of papers, Marcos Gleizer defends Spinoza's solution of the circle between evidence and that would affect Descartes' epistemology at its core. Against most readings, Gleizer argues that Spinoza's thesis of the "self-manifestation of reason" allows him to avoid the circularity between the truth of clear and distinct ideas, and God's existence.

Descartes' conception of the eternal truths is under scrutiny in the two following papers. Ethel Rocha considers some epistemological consequences of Descartes' conception of the divine creation of the eternal truths. Finally, Rocha argues that view seems to commit Descartes to the impossibility for the human mind to fully grasp the truth, but this in turn stands in tension with Descartes' entire metaphysical project. In his paper, Alfredo Gatto explores the connection between Descartes' thesis of God's free creation of the eternal truths and the idea of a theodicy, to argue that Leibniz' and Malebranche's project of a theodicy entails the rejection of the basi tenets of Descartes' thesis.

Finally, two papers are devoted to recent debates on Italian philosophy. Corrado Claverini sketches a genealogy of the recent debates on what has been labelled "Italian Thought" and the grounds of the growing international reception of Italian philosophy. Focusing on one defining moment in that debate, that is, Roberto Esposito's *Living Thought*, Raffaele Ariano points out in the reconstruction of an Italian philosophical tradition the striving to overcome the boundaries of academic philosophy, and the role played by the interpretation of Spinoza's thought in the ontological transformation of Michel Foucault's idea of biopolitics.

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