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Editorial

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Synthese, Editorial 2008, first issue

2008 will be the first year in which we implement fully the new structure for *Synthese*, as described in our editorial statement in January of 2007. Most conspicuously, we have now created a strong and lively board of area editors in order to actively assist and advise the editors-in-chief in the editorial and review processes, while maintaining a balance between general and special thematic issues of our journal.

As we developed this board over the course of the year, we were all saddened by one very bad piece of news. Susan Hurley, who had joined the group in 2006, died in August 2007. Over a distinguished and multifarious career, her work has exemplified the combination of philosophical sophistication and interdisciplinary sensitivity which we hoped could characterize the future of this journal. She will be deeply missed.

Our definitive group consists of the following twelve area editors:

- Computability and computer science: *Luciano Floridi*
- Epistemology: *Horacio Arló-Costa*
- History of early analytic philosophy: *Paolo Mancosu*
- Language and linguistics: *Robert van Rooij*
- Logic and mathematics: *Gabriel Sandu*
- Metaphysics: *Achille Varzi*
- Methodology and general philosophy of science: *Paul Humphreys*
- Mind and cognitive science: *Lucia Vaina*
- Physics: *Sonja Smets*
- Psychology and neuroscience: *John Bickle*
- Social philosophy and the social sciences: *Raymond Dacey*
- Technology, biology and artificial life: *Mark Bedau*

We are grateful for their enthusiastic participation and are eagerly awaiting the excellent issues that will appear in the near future. In general, the editors of *Synthese* have modeled the new editorial practices on those of journals in the natural sciences, relying on the active participation of energetic and authoritative colleagues in the main areas which fall within the scope of the journal. At the same time, our twelve area editors are open-minded colleagues whose work shows broader engagement beyond their sub-specialization – and thus, we hope that they will encourage genuine interdisciplinarity. This distribution of editorial responsibility is our way of working to deepen our expertise without sacrificing this journal's traditional virtues.

Indeed, the new structure reflects both the traditional aims and scope of *Synthese* and our current vision for pursuing it. As the subtitle reflects, *Synthese* is a journal for epistemology, logic and philosophy, thus not a general philosophy journal, let alone one meant only for an in-house audience of philosophers. Rather, *Synthese* is a journal devoted to interdisciplinary philosophical inquiry in which the use of methods from the sciences is found at center stage. It is notable that *Synthese* is one of the few philosophy journals listed in the International Science Index. The vision for *Synthese* is to continue, further articulate and develop this scientifically oriented approach to philosophical research. We will also be supported in this endeavor by a small Strategic Advisory Board consisting of

- *Peter Gärdenfors*, University of Lund, Sweden
- *Clark Glymour*, Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, USA
- *Jaakko Hintikka*, Boston University, Mass., USA
- *Robert Stalnaker*, MIT, Cambridge, Mass., USA

While the new editorial structure reflects our ambitious goals, plain reality, too, supports it. It is highly encouraging to see the wide international response to our Journal, belying statements (whether in applauding or deploring mode) one hears about the current ‘inward turn’ to ‘core philosophy’. *Synthese* is now the biggest journal in philosophy, publishing 18 issues with a page budget of more than 2500 pages annually. About half of the issues are devoted to varia while the other half is comprised of special issues and the subsection of *Synthese, Knowledge, Rationality and Action*. Some information about our editorial processes may be in order. Receiving more than 400 unsolicited manuscripts a year, every submission which goes out for review receives a least 2 review reports, independently of whether the paper in the end is accepted for publication or not. There are two related reasons for keeping this policy in place: (1) it is an important service to the community to receive qualified feedback for a submitted paper, and (2) academic research is a self-regulating mechanism with respect to the avoidance of error and the pursuit of truth, and review reports are an important ingredient in that.

Not only should authors get qualified feedback but they should also get it in a reasonable amount of time. Given the current electronic submission system (<http://synt.edmgr.com>) both authors, editors and reviewers can access information about a submission currently under review at any given time. The average time between initial submission and first verdict is approximately 3 months, and from acceptance to publication on the order of ½ - 1 year. The number of papers which are accepted for publication after the first review is very small. Most papers go through at least one round of revisions but usually two or three revisions are called for. We see the “revise and resubmit” process in *Synthese* as another phase in the trial and error process of scientific inquiry. So papers published in *Synthese* are carefully crafted, just like special issues in the journal are carefully groomed. Special issues are thematically unified with an interdisciplinary outlook and are all closely overseen either by the editors-in-chief or by the relevant area editor.

As for other initiatives announced in last year’s editorial to make our mission publicly visible, the *Synthese Annual Conference* is now in place and the first event was held at the Carlsberg Academy in Copenhagen in October 2007. The theme of the conference was *Between Logic and Intuition: David Lewis and the Future of Formal Methods in Philosophy*. The conference was a success and the proceedings will be coming out later this year as a homogenous anthology in the *Synthese Library Series*. The preliminary theme for the Synthese Annual Conference 2008 is *The Methodology of Philosophy* and more information about the event will be available in the journal in due time.

It will be clear from all this that *Synthese* is going through major changes, some in terms of changing scientific realities, others because of fast-changing electronic technology. Our journal is very different from what it was even just a decade ago in terms of editorial, publication, and marketing processes. But while we are in the midst,

perhaps even the vanguard, of all this innovation, we still see ourselves squarely within the tradition and character of the journal throughout its seventy year history. Since the publication of its first issue in 1936, *Synthese* has been devoted to creating a community of philosophers and scientists in a shared intellectual enterprise. This was not because of 'interdisciplinarity' as some sort of virtue in itself, but rather, as the Editors saw it, as the only way of identifying the larger issues of one's times. Here is how they phrased this, when explaining their new journal with its title:

"Het zal trachten zijn lezers een inzicht te geven in de groote denkproblemen die zich aan de huidige generatie onweerstaanbaar opdringen. Het zal speuren, door de ver-doorgevoerde specialisatie op schier elk gebied héén, naar den innerlijken samenhang der vakwetenschappen."

'*Synthese* will try to give its readers insight into the great problems of thought that inevitably impose themselves on the current generation. And it will search, beyond extreme specialization in the sciences, for their internal coherence.'

But they even wrote something more about their new Journal, which may ring strange to cynical modern ears:

"Het wil een vraagbaak zijn voor den denkenden mensch, die de zin van onze tijd tracht te verstaan, en een tribune voor die vakgeleerden en wijsgeren die klaarheid pogen te brengen in ons vertroebeld denk- en gevoelsleven."

'*Synthese* wants to be a beacon for thinking persons who are trying to understand our times, and a forum for those scientists and philosophers who are trying to bring clarity to our obscured thoughts and feelings.'

The Editors were not just interested in a community of cleverness and academic careers. They saw the intellectual community of philosophy and the sciences as a way of making sense of one's times, intellectually and socially, and that for a larger audience. High-sounding ideals like these may be out of fashion these days, but even now, 80 years later, one feels the nobility of spirit.

Indeed, the subsequent development of *Synthese* itself through the century up until now is a fascinating story of philosophy and its interfaces with the sciences, and society at large. We have decided to devote a special issue to that history, which will come out in 2008, with participation from the editors, some invited authors, and the publishers at Springer who are helping us make *Synthese* the thriving enterprise that it is today.

Johan van Benthem
Vincent F. Hendricks
John Symons

Editors-in-Chief