

## APPA was in Rome at the XXV World Congress of Philosophy 2024



by Patrizia Salvaterra, Special Correspondent

The XXV World Congress of Philosophy (WCP) entitled “Philosophy across boundaries” has just concluded; a global event which took place in Rome, Italy, from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> of August 2024 at La Sapienza University campus, with the active participation of a large group of APPA’s directors, faculty, and practitioners; among the many, **Lou Marinoff**, **Lydia Amir**, **Ora Gruengard**, **José Barrientos Rastrojo**, **David Sumiacher**, **Michael Picard**, **Balaganapathi Devarakonda**, **Massimo Pigliucci**, **Patrizia Salvaterra**, etc. On the last day, during the closing ceremony in the university’s Aula Magna, **Emidio Spinelli** - chair of the organizing committee, and **Luca Maria Scarantino** - president of FISP (*The International Federation of Philosophical Society* established in 1948) presented some impressive data regarding the congress: 5,723 philosophers coming from 109 countries, present on site; 89 topics explored and discussed; 8,626 abstracts received and 4,309 accepted; 997 papers presented by students, coming from high schools, college and PHD programs, during Sunday 4<sup>th</sup>, a day entirely dedicated to them. Statistics that may prove the extraordinary vitality of philosophy, and its fundamental role, still crucial today, in our globalized, rapidly evolving, digital society.

On a more existential level, for many of us it was a true pleasure meeting new and old friends and colleagues, some of them for the first time in the flesh, after the last years of virtual exchanges. We all know how networking plays a pivotal role in all educational processes. Maybe in philosophy even more: not only it allows to maintain the dialogue over time with those individuals and groups with whom we share our field of interests, beliefs, and values, but it indirectly confirms the importance of human, practical relations for the growth of philosophical thought.

Philosophical Counseling was one of the most debated topics. Multiple associations from different geographies were present, together with **APPA** (*American Philosophical Practitioners Association*): **CECAPFI** (*Centro Educativo para la Creación Autónoma en Prácticas Filosóficas*) from Mexico and Argentina, **BOECIO** (*Philosophical Practice for*

*People at Risk of Social Exclusion*) from Spain, **RATIO** (*Association of Philosophers Practitioners*) from Russia, **PPAI** (*Philosophical Practitioners Association of India*) from India, **PRAGMA** (*Società dei Professionisti nelle Pratiche Filosofiche in Italia*) and **METIS** from Italy, and many others.

Particularly enriching and inspiring were some round tables (RT) and sessions organized and chaired by **Lydia Amir**, a member of APPA's international board from Tufts University. A first RT (on August the 3<sup>rd</sup>) was entitled "The Human Condition: Rekindling the Philosophic Dialogue" and saw the participation of many experts, such as **Giorgio Baruchello** ("On Cruelty"), **Giovanni J. Abbarno** ("On Poverty"), **Michael Paroussis** ("On Relationality"), and **Lou Marinoff** ("On War"). Marinoff's presentation was focused on a controversial topic that the APPA's founder had deeply examined in his book entitled *On Human Conflict: The Philosophical Foundations of War and Peace* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019). As for Amir's introduction, "like a contemporary Tolstoy, there is no aspect that has remained untouched in Marinoff's research on war and peace". Thomas Hobbes and Sigmund Freud (among others) have argued that war is a permanent condition of human life and societies – and the list of ongoing armed conflicts around the world may prove that. But for Marinoff war is not necessary, as it originates from the worst, deplorable characteristics of human beings – the exaltation of the Ego, the will to power, the thirst for domination. On the contrary, peace is not a mere utopia: it is a possible and desirable condition. But how to build a global community that lives in peace instead of war? Practicing philosophy in our daily lives, desiring peace, and applying ethics and compassion to our decisions, says Marinoff. Doing this, all human beings can achieve an evolution consciousness that can transform our destructive, primitive animalistic instincts into positive interactions and healthy competitions. Ancient Greek philosophy, and Eastern Buddhist and Confucian philosophies, may help human beings to enact the "spontaneous individual beneficence (i.e. peace) instead of "organized group violence: (i.e. war). According to this perspective, philosophy works like a sort of wake-up-call, an alert that may help us to live in peace with ourselves, nature and humankind.

Other sessions were entirely dedicated to humor, examined through diverse perspectives. During the morning of August 5<sup>th</sup>, **Lydia Amir**, who is also the president of *The International Association for the Philosophy of Humor*, and founding editor of the Gruyter Series in Philosophy of Humor, summarized recent books and themes, including *Cruelty and Humor*. In the afternoon, there were lectures and presentations by **Andrea Hurst**, **Tristan Burt**, **Elena García Peláez Cruz**, **Richard M. Rubin**, **Patrizia Salvaterra**, **Brian Robinson**, **Lauren Olin**, **Michael K. Cundall Jr.**, **Mark Ralkoswki**.

On August the 6<sup>th</sup>, a panel composed by experts - among them **David Bartosch**, **Finn Thorbjørn Hansen**, **Lou Marinoff**, **José Barrientos Rastrojo**, **Andrea Hurst**, **Giovanni J. Abbarno** examined the theme of "Transformative Philosophy" through the lens of history, and the concepts of will, wonder, experience, understanding, and love.

The following day, another session – "Between Theory and Practice" - was aimed to present the latest book written by **Ora Gruengard**, an Israeli pioneer and member of APPA's International Advisory Board, entitled *Philosophy in Philosophical Counseling: Unmasked*

*Questions, Open Answers* (Lexington Books, 2023). The book was commented on by **Anders Lindseth, Giancarlo Marinelli, Michael Picard** and **David Sumiacher**.

**Michael Picard's** long-awaited English translation of essays by **Gerd Achenbach — *Philosophical Praxis*** — fresh off the press, was also a featured panel presentation, with both Michael and Gerd presiding.

**Massimo Pigliucci**, an APPA Certified Practitioner and noteworthy exponent of Stoicism, gave two presentations on pseudo-science: one entitled “A broader demarcation problem: science, pseudoscience, and pseudophilosophy?” at a panel on Demarcation, Pseudoscience and the problem of Disinformation; the second one entitled “Feyerabend and the problem of pseudoscience” at a panel celebrating the 100th anniversary of the birth of Paul Feyerabend.

A large delegation of Indian scholars was also present at the congress. **Balaganapathi Devarakonda**, an APPA Certified practitioner and co-founder of PPAI (*Philosophical Practitioners Association of India*) based in New Delhi, talked about spiritual ecology in “Akshara-Puruṣottama Darśana”, articulating the link between spirituality and the contemporary concept of sustainability, and affirming that “*action is inaction*”.

The Chinese and Japanese delegations were also numerous, proving the importance of philosophy inside and outside the universities. Their thought traces back to their ancient spiritual traditions, deeply rooted in Confucianism and Buddhism, but one of the RT chaired by **Ke Zhou** regarded a new interpretation of some modern philosophers from the Western European tradition, such as Karl Marx, who has been recently reread and revised, after the discover and first time publication of long-neglected notebooks, where the German philosopher – according to the British scholar David McLellan – affirms the value of Nature and the importance of an ecological thinking.

Many African delegates were also present at the congress. Nowadays some African scholars, such as **Aurélien Ulrich Metendé** and **Martin Nkafu Nkemnkia**, are trying to identify and share their authentic philosophical traditions, deeply rooted in their multifaced cultures, through the discovery and publication of ancient texts and oral testimonies, pointing out the value to express those original concepts and ideas in their own African languages.

The Congress organized two interesting exhibitions. The first was dedicated to an Italian philosopher, writer and politician - Antonio Gramsci, who spent almost 20 years in prison just for defending his ideas of justice and peace. The second one was organized by a digital transformation company based in Padua and named “Eng” (Engineering), which allowed us – through an augmented, tridimensional reality – to dialogue with the avatars of Plato and Confucius.

Art, in particular literature and music, animated the congress. Some romantic arias from Giacomo Puccini's opera *Tosca*, composed in 1900, were performed during the opening ceremony at the “Terme di Caracalla”; other five more evenings were dedicated to the interconnection among music, literature and philosophy, and took place at the “Stadio Palatino”, built under Emperor Domitian between 81 and 92 CE; in the University Theatre – with improvised philosophical music by Dmitri Tymoczko and his ensemble, inspired by John

Cage and Arnold Schoenberg; and in the Aula Magna – with live traditional, popular music from Southern Italy: Taranta and Tarantella.

In conclusion, the XXV WCP 2024 has been an extraordinary experience for all of us – an unforgettable opportunity to dialogue with scholars of all ages, coming from different latitudes and academic traditions, with an enriching variety of languages, and unified by the love for philosophy, the research for the meaning of life, and the growing respect for nature.

*Some photos by Patrizia and others can be viewed here.*

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1NeheArpBCBauJXtZ8lnP2eTJOXoEt799?usp=sharing>